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# IN MOTHER'S PLACE

OR,

## THE JAY FAMILY.

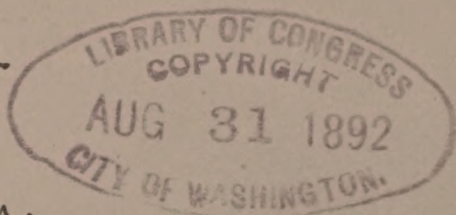
BY

KATE NEELY FESTETITS,

*Author of "The Flower Mission," "From Post to Pillar,"  
"The Old Academy," "Irma," "Leslie  
Rossiter," etc., etc., etc.*

35  
"As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

DEUT. 33, 25.



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TO MY DEAR SISTER SUE:  
THE ONLY MOTHER  
OF MY MOTHERLESS GIRLHOOD,  
THIS STORY OF A SISTER'S DEVOTION,  
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY  
THE AUTHOR.



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# IN MOTHER'S PLACE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE JAY FAMILY.

NOT that their name was Jay, by any means, for the family surname was Jerome; it was only a whimsical notion of the father, suggested by certain odd coincidences, which had caused the big brown cottage at the upper end of Main street to be known as "The Jay-birds' Nest," and its occupants to have won through all the country round the sobriquet of the "Jay Family."

When the first little fledgling came into the nest, and a name was to be chosen, the mother said to the father,

"Why it must be Jocelyn, of course, after your mother!"

And when a little sister came by and by to keep Jocelyn company, the father said to the mother,



"Why she must be Juliet, after your good mother!"

The boy who followed was "Joe," of course, since his father was Joseph; and similarly, the next little daughter was Janet, since that was her gentle mother's name. By this time it became a foregone conclusion that "J." was the initial letter of each and every member of the family; and when two more little girls appeared in due succession, Mr. Jerome promptly decided that one was to be "Jemima," in honor of a certain bachelor uncle James, who had been very good to him in the way of tips when he was a school-boy; and the little curly-headed, bewitching baby was to have the pretty name of "Jessica," in compliment to a cousin of their mother's, who lived in Washington and was the children's special Santa Claus, Christmas after Christmas, as long as they could remember.

Mrs. Jerome was one of those sweet and sunny-natured women who never make opposition unless it seems really unavoidable. She only laughed good-humoredly at her husband's whimsical notion, and stipulated that a middle initial should be inserted in each little one's name to avoid hopeless confusion in the matter of signatures, addresses, and the like, as they



grew up: and so, as the wide old rambling house filled gradually with merry young inmates, fluttering busily here and there, and making its brown walls echo with their chattering, it came to be known as the Jay-birds' Nest.

A very happy family they were on the whole, united in interest and affection; devoted to their parents, and attached to each other; living a sweet, wholesome life, rich in all healthy activities and enjoyments; and breathing a rare home atmosphere of love and comfort under the brooding care of their sunny-hearted mother.

“‘Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, and all her paths *are* peace;’ Why, that’s like you, mother!” broke out little Janet in a tone of wondering pleasure one day, as she sat spelling out her Sunday-school texts in her little chair by her mother’s side. And though Mrs. Jerome laughed and shook her head, exclaiming, “Oh no, that is wisdom, my dear!” Janet was quietly convinced in her own quaint little mind of the correctness of her own interpretation; and only compromised to the extent of feeling sure that if the text really did refer to the thing called wisdom, then her mother must be wisdom personified, so exactly did the description suit her. And the



rest of the children would have agreed with Janet.

For well nigh a score of long happy years the brooding mother-wing hovered over the peaceful nest; and the nestlings, all but the latest fledgling, baby Jessie, were getting to be full-feathered and strong-pinioned: indeed there had been at times a vague hint afloat in the air that the eldest, the tall and dignified Jocelyn, might ere long be thinking of winging her flight from the parent nest to a tinier one of her own. When lo, or ever the poor birdlings were aware that danger hovered near, the brooding wing was tremblingly withdrawn, the guardian mother, obeying the summons of the great All-father, had taken her flight heavenward, and the nest seemed left unto itself desolate.

They had all—father as well as children—grown into such loving dependence upon the sweet and bright spirit which made perpetual sunshine in their home, that when her loving eyes had closed, her cheery smile faded, it seemed as though the light had vanished forever from their lives, and that henceforth they were to sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

“May God help you! I don't know what is to become of you, my poor motherless chil-



dren !” their father had cried in the anguish of his soul, as they entered together, after leaving their beloved form in her last resting-place, the open door where never again would she stand to greet them with her welcoming smile.

“Do what you can for them, Jocelyn ; it is to you we shall have to look now, child, to take her place, and may the Lord have mercy on us all !”

He plunged into the darkness of the close-shut library as he uttered this heart-broken appeal ; and the children gathered about their elder sister, crying, and trying to get as close to her as possible.

Poor girl ! she felt in her quivering heart that she needed a mother herself almost as much as any of them, woman grown though she was ; and the sudden sense of responsibility thus laid upon her came with almost appalling weight.

“*She* ‘take her mother’s place !’ Who in all the wide world could do that ?”

But the pitiful sound of young things weeping startled her into instant effort. She made a strenuous struggle to gain a semblance of composure, and putting out her arms she drew her little sisters close to her trembling breast. They clung to her as to a welcome refuge, Jemima and Janet ; Joe stood a little apart, knotting his features strangely, and hugging



his breast tight to keep back the sobs which he thought not manly enough for his fourteen years. His sister made room for him too, within the comforting circle of her arm.

"Come," she said, her tender, tremulous voice, trying bravely to steady itself. "Come, dears, let us try to do just as we know she would like to have us; just as if we felt she was near us and could see us. Let us go and light the lamp and brighten the fire and have supper."

Would they ever "have supper" again in the old cosy fashion, seasoning the simple dishes with laugh and chatter, each one bringing some tale of the day's doings to swell the general store of household talk, sure of interest and sympathy from all the others! Well,—she could only try!—

"A cup of tea will do father good," she went on; "and afterward, we will try to do just the old pleasant things. We will get out the books and games; I will read you a story, or play for you and we will sing. Come——"

And they went with her readily as she led the way to the sitting-room, feeling already a little comforted; a little as though there were still some household centre of strength and cheer such as young hearts need to gather round.

Not so Juliet, the girl next in age to the



elder sister. She had got out of the carriage and entered the empty house with the others; was one of the group standing irresolutely in the hall when her father made that piteous appeal to his eldest daughter on behalf of the others; and her young heart had swelled as she heard it with a jealous sense of being overlooked, or underrated.

“Why couldn’t he have asked *me* to help, too?” she said to herself, giving way to wounded feeling. “I am not a child any longer; I am nearly sixteen years old; and I think I have quite as much sense in many ways as Jocelyn. I know mother used to trust me with a good many things, and say she relied on me for them. But I see how it is going to be now: as if it wouldn’t be miserable enough anyhow with her gone! Jocelyn is going to rule everybody, and father’s just lost enough without mother to let her do it. Very well: she may manage the others as much as they’ll let her; I’m old enough to manage for myself.”

She turned her eyes away from the wistful glance with which her sister had sought to include her in her proposal, resolutely declining to defer to what she chose to consider an authoritative suggestion.

“Why should she think it necessary to *invite* us into our own home-room, where we belong as



much as she does? The idea of reading story-books, and playing and singing, anyhow, the very day poor mother is laid in her grave! I don't see how they can be so heartless! I shall go up to my own room and think about her; it's all the comfort there is left to me now!"

Her dark eyes filled with tears of grief and pain as she turned aside from the others and took her solitary way up the broad, shallow flight of stairs which had always been a favorite romping-place in the old happy days. She did not keep on up to her own room as she had at first intended, but pausing at the landing upon which her mother's chamber opened, she stood listening for a moment, then entered softly and closed the door behind her.

"They are all down-stairs—trying to forget. I shall have it to myself—to remember—for awhile, anyhow."

She glanced about her in the shadowy room; her eyes turning from one to another dear familiar object; the big rocking-chair by the window, where her mother sat and sewed, singing softly snatches of old fashioned hymns over her work, and looking up with a quick smile and word as the children came and went about her; at the dressing-table, where mother's bay-water and rose-glycerine, yes, even her



handkerchief-box and comb-case, were at the service, in case of need, of her less provident girls; at the bed, with its faint suggestion of lavendered linen, on which she had seen the dear form lying white and straight and silent never more to meet eager look and speech with answering smile and word.

This last sight was too much for the poor girl's self-control: she forgot all jealousy, all injured feeling in the overwhelming sense of loss and grief: "O God, what *shall* we do without her? O God, *help* us to bear it!" she prayed in an agony of love and sorrow, and sinking upon the floor beside the straight white bed, she buried her head in her hands, and let all his waves and billows come over her.

Meanwhile, down in the family room below the elder sister, quite unconscious that she was the cause, however indirectly, of adding a fresh sting to the younger's suffering, was bravely doing her best to "have things as *she* would have had them." The fire was brightened until the shadows were lost in its ruddy glow; the lamp upon the round table shed a soft lustre through its rose-colored shade; the books and magazines which had been laid away in that awful orderliness which belongs to funeral preparations, were scattered once more in comfortable



fashion over the crimson cloth; and "I have an idea," said Jocelyn cheerfully.

"Suppose we bring a tray in here with some cups and plates—the fire is so low in the dining-room, it seems chilly there—and have a sort of picnic supper this evening? Don't you think it would be nice, children? Who will help me?"

"Oh! too much trouble," growled Joe out of the depths of his father's easy chair, into which he had huddled himself and sat staring gloomily into the fire. "Who wants any, anyhow?"

Janet lifted her big brown eyes for a moment from the book in which she had lost herself—Janet was usually lost in the pages of some fascinating book or other—and dropped them again with a little reluctant movement; but Jemima said promptly,

"Oh yes, anything for a change! I'll help you, Jocelyn, and then Aunt Peggy can't make a fuss about the 'bother.' We'll make some rolls of thin bread and butter, and cut some ham—"

"And get out some fig-preserves then," sounded the gruff voice from the big chair by the fire. "And mind you don't eat 'em all up yourself, Jem."

"No indeed; we'll remember your sweet tooth, Joe, won't we Jocelyn?" rejoined his



sister good naturedly, pleased at the prospect of a little cheerful bustle. Jem was of a lively and active disposition, and grew restless and nervous under long repression.

"We'll even let him have some cream for his figs, if we can coax Aunt Peggy, poor fellow. Come ahead, Jocelyn!"

The elder sister put her arm affectionately around the little eager figure, and they took their way together out through the colonnade into the kitchen. Aunt Peggy, the old colored servant who had lived with the family ever since the girls could remember, was sitting there in a low splint-bottomed rocker in front of the stove, moving slowly to and fro, her withered brown face set in dark lines of grief and trouble. She did not rise when the young ladies entered, but sat bolt upright in her chair, turning the whites of her eyes toward them with a furtive, half-defiant glance, and waiting for them to speak first.

"Mebbe dese yere young folks won't want to keep old Peggy no longer," she was thinking in her suspicious old soul. "Want a spry young 'oman, kin fly 'roun faster, an' do mo' wuk, kase dey ain't got deir mudder now to h'ep. Well! dey kin git her den, f'all ole Peggy keers. Dish yer Jay family ain't gwine be de same no-how, now Missus is gone. Dunno wha' foh de



heben'y Marster didn' take Peggy 'stid o' dat sweet angel anyhow. Leabe her heah fo' dese yere young uns to awdah roun'; she too ole dog to learn new tricks dis time o' day."

Jem's quick eyes glanced curiously at the old servant, and then at her new young mistress, but Jocelyn did not seem to observe anything singular.

"Poor old soul!" she was saying to herself as she advanced toward the middle of the kitchen; "She is missing her too!" and her voice was very gentle as she called

"Peggy!"

The old woman started. It was the first time one of the "chillun" had ever left off the prefix of "aunt," usually accorded by young people to old colored retainers. The omission was purely accidental on Jocelyn's part, but it was perhaps a fortunate accident just at that crisis; for it seemed to convey to the old servant's mind an instantaneous conviction that here was her mistress, and brought a curious comforting sense of re-settlement in her own former position to her mind.

She was on her feet in a moment. "Laws honey, you started me, speakin' so like yer maw," she said in the familiar, respectful tone she had been in the habit of using to her late mistress. "What is it ye want, Miss Jos'lyn?"



“Didn’ know wheddah you uns felt like suppah o’ no, dis evenin’. Do you good to eat sumfin’, dough.”

“I want my father to have a cup of tea,” said Jocelyn, speaking in a quiet, controlled voice. “See that the kettle boils, please, and make him a bit of toast. Miss Jem and I will get what the rest of us want;” and she moved toward the pantry with the quiet air of one who “belonged.”

The old servant sent an odd glance after the young lady’s retreating figure.

“Miss Jem!” she repeated to herself with a sort of inward sniff. “Her mudder nevah axed me to ‘miss’ none on ’em ’cept de oldest. Well! ole Peggy don’ keer; it’s allee same to her.”

Jem was really more excited about it.

“Why Jocelyn!” she exclaimed under her breath, as she followed her sister into the pantry, “Is Aunt Peggy really to call us all ‘Miss’ now? My! how big it will make us feel!”

“Well, you are all of you getting to be great girls,” said Jocelyn gravely. “And you know the real authority in the house is gone now, Jem, and it will not be easy for me to keep everything straight and smooth unless you all help. And I think it would help to keep



Aunt Peggy in her place, not to look upon you all as mere children. Of course, mother didn't care to make any change—she has been with us all since we were babies—but I think now it will be just as well.”

“Oh, I think it will be a great deal better!” said Jem, approvingly. “I was getting pretty tired of her being ‘so bumptious with me; every-time I went into the kitchen, it was ‘Do cl’ar outen heah! you chillun is alwuz unner my feet. G’long up-stairs an’ play de pianner; white folks got no bizness in de kitchen!’ I used to tell mother, but mother said Aunt Peggy had nursed me once through the scarlet fever when she couldn’t take care of me herself on account of the baby; and that I mustn’t mind, and not bother her. And now just look at me here, fussing round in the pantry, just as I like, and she not opening her mouth!”

“But you mustn’t ‘fuss round’, nor be ‘bumptious,’ yourself,—I don’t think those are very nice expressions; do you, dear? Nor go into the store room unless I am with you, or send you, Jem. We must try and do things as nearly as possible as *she* did them; and when you are old enough, I will take you into the kitchen and teach you things, just as she did me. And I don’t think Aunt Peggy will speak to you in just that way any more now she is



gone—but we must try not to upset her. She's a faithful old soul; and she loved our mother, and mother had a warm feeling for her. I know she meant she should always stay with us, and we'd find it hard to fill her place. So we must all be careful. Now, dear, I think we have spread enough slices. Do you think you can roll them up without breaking?"

"Oh yes! mother used often to let me help her. She used to say my fingers were cleverer than my head, but that there was need in the world for that sort as well as the other. Now you, Jocelyn, you must be one of the clever heads, to think out every thing so, all at once——"

"And do you take it my fingers must be proportionately stupid?" rejoined her sister with a little fleeting flush and smile. "I hope not, Jem, for oh, I do want to try to have things as she used to, and I do hope you will all help me!"

"De kittle's bilin', Miss Jocelyn," announced Aunt Peggy at this moment. "Shill I make de tea, an' kyar it in to yer pa?"

"No. You can set it to draw and I'll come and take it to him myself. You may skim a little cream for me, Aunt Peggy, into this little pitcher; there'll be enough left for coffee in the morning."



The old negress rolled the white of her eyes at her in her curious fashion ; but Jocelyn went on composedly, " Aren't you almost ready now, Jem ? I have got the figs Joe wanted. You take the small tray, and I'll carry the one with the cups and plates——"

" No'm you won't do no sich a thing, if you please," objected Aunt Peggy in her most decided tone. " I'll jess take dat ar tray in mys'ef ; it's too hebby fo' dem little white han's o' yourn. You jess git along ahead, outen my way, please, ' Miss ' Jem ; an' you go in an' sit down, Miss Jos'lyn, honey, an' I'll bring you de cream in a minnit. You 'have yo'se'f jess like Missus, and ole Peggy wait on ye jess like she done on Missus. Dah, now ; jess git along' bofe of ye."

" Humph ! *she's* settled !" commented Jem in an undertone, with a nod of her shrewd little head. " Takes you, Jocelyn !"

Her sister gave a little half-smile. She too was feeling relieved ; she had had a certain unacknowledged dread of her first assumption of the character of mistress with Aunt Peggy.

" Who will go and ask Juliet to come down ?" she asked now. " You, Janet ; Jem has been helping me." Janet looked up dreamily from her book, and prepared to obey at her leisure ;



but Jemima broke in in her wonted eager fashion :

“ Oh no, never mind, Janet ; just try and get back from dreamland so as to eat your own supper. I'll call Jule——”

And away she went up-stairs, her active young limbs much preferring movement to rest.

But when she reached the landing upon which the door of her mother's room opened, she paused, suddenly overtaken by childish dread. No one had thought to light the hall-lamp yet ; the staircase was in twilight and dimly peopled with shadows from the waving branches outside the window ; Jemima's brisk steps were checked by a feeling of nameless awe, and standing at the head of the stairs she called in a hushed voice,

“ Juliet ! Where are you ? ”

There was a sound of movement, in the silence on the other side of the closed door, and the next moment it opened, and the older girl appeared upon the threshold with pale face and disordered hair.

“ Why *Juliet* ! ” exclaimed the child in an awed whisper ; “ Are you in that room—all by yourself ! ”

“ And why not ? In *mother's* room ? Why Jemima, what do you mean ? ”



But you know they say—I've heard Aunt Peggy tell—" the little girl paused, abashed.

"Aunt Peggy has no business talking, and you no business listening, to anything that would make you feel so about going into that room," rejoined her sister severely. "Why Jemima, I am ashamed of you! Suppose mother were here this minute, suppose God would let her come back, do you think it could be for anything but good for us, for her own dear children?"

"I only wish he would let her come back, let her be near us every hour of the day and the night, to be our guardian angel as she always was! We shall need her sorely enough!"

The sorrowful young voice broke into a sob, and Jemima hastened to create a diversion.

"Well, come down anyhow, Jule, and get some supper, or you'll have a headache. Jocelyn and I have fixed everything so nice,—and oh, Jule! I tell you! Jocelyn's going to be mistress in real good earnest. She just knows how. Aunt Peggy was all ready to be as stiff as, as anything! but Jocelyn limbered her down just as easy! And we've got preserved figs and cream, and I'll get you a piece of hot toast and a cup of tea, if you want it."

The young girl drew herself back, and answered in a tone of chill rebuke:



"I don't want anything, thank you. I can't think about eating and drinking just yet, Jemima. I wonder at you all—but of course——"

She checked herself abruptly, and Jem, although the soul of good nature, felt impelled to answer a little aggressively :

"Now see here, Jule," she said in her shrewd little way ; " As Aunt Peggy says, ' the pot mustn't call the kettle black.' Even if we were what you seem to think—and we're not, we're trying to do for the best—it wouldn't be any worse than for you to be jealous—of Jocelyn."

Her sister started as if she had received a blow.

"What—what do you mean?" she almost gasped in a passionate undertone.

"Oh—nothing. Only I happened to be looking at you when father said—said that—to Jocelyn," stammered the little girl, half frightened at her own boldness. "But there, Jule, for mercy's sake, don't begin having any of your high-tragics just as soon as poor mother is gone. Do come down-stairs and try to make things cheerful like the rest of us——"

"*Cheerful!*" repeated her sister in a voice full of bitterness and pain, and turning back into the silent chamber, without another word, she closed the door behind her.



“Jealous—of one sister! Accused of it by another!” she cried inly, throwing herself again on her knees beside the beloved empty bed. “O, heavenly Father, is it true? Make me know it, if it is!”

Below in the hushed and darkened study, another heart was wrestling in prayer for resignation, for strength. The bereaved husband, the anxious father, sat there alone, his arms folded upon the table, his head bowed upon them; his heart aching with a longing that would not be eased for the dear companion, who at this hour was wont to make the dusky room with its shelves filled with rows upon rows of dingy law-books, alight and alive with her cheery presence. He had not besought in vain the help of the heavenly Father.

“Thy will be done!” Jocelyn heard him breathe in a long deep sigh as she stood with her little white-napkinned tray at his door.

It brought the tears that lay longing to be shed in her tender gray eyes, and Jemima seeing these tears, as she came hurrying toward her, eager to tell how Juliet thought them all heartless, and had refused to join them, had wit enough not to speak just then, but slip back again to the sitting-room, and expend her energies in serving their supper to Janet and Joe.

Jocelyn meanwhile entered the study at her



father's hoarse, "Come in;" and groping her way through the dusk to the table, set down her tray.

"You mustn't sit here in the dark, father," she said in a gentle, womanly tone, feeling on the mantel-shelf for the match-box, and lighting the lamp with her mother's own dextrous fingers. "I have brought you a cup of nice hot tea, and I want you to drink it. You will, won't you, because I want you to?" she coaxed, almost wondering at herself the while, at the ease with which the familiar tone she had never thought of using with this grave dignified father, came to her now that she saw him alone and crushed with grief.

It fell soothingly upon the ear and heart of the desolate man, accustomed as he was to his wife's unfailing kindness, and he lifted his heavy eyes with a look of appreciation toward his daughter.

"Thank you, my dear," he said with an effort. "I will try; yes, because you wish me to;" but here the deep voice faltered, and Jocelyn, feeling instinctively that he would be better able to comply with her wish alone, bent down silently, touched his forehead with her trembling lips, and made her way softly out of the room.

She stopped in the hall to light the lamp there, and to compose her agitated face before



entering the sitting-room where the young folks were awaiting her. Jemima jumped up to give her a seat.

"Jule doesn't want any supper just now," she said in her bustling way. "But I'm going to take some ginger snaps up to her room when I go up to bed. Jule likes ginger snaps."

"And she doesn't like to be called 'Jule'" suggested Jocelyn with a little smile of reminder.

"Oh, I know she don't. It's all nonsense though. Oh, here comes Jessie, I do believe, waked up at last!" and Jemima who didn't like anything she did to be objected to, hurried to open the door as the sound of a childish voice was heard in the hall.

A pretty little girl of three years broke away from her nurse's hand and ran into the midst of the group. She stood for a moment, gazing from one to another, her big blue eyes wide with trouble.

"I want my mamma!" she cried piteously, and then turning suddenly toward her eldest sister, buried her head in Jocelyn's outstretched arms.

"That's right, little dear," said Jemima, "Jocelyn is mamma now to all of us!"



## CHAPTER II.

### JOCELYN MAKES A BEGINNING.

“**A**RE we to go school to-day, father?” inquired Jemima as they were sitting at breakfast next morning. Jemima was always the first to ask questions.

“Of course; why not? What’s the good of moping round the house?” growled Joe, without waiting for his father to reply.

“Well now Joe, I didn’t ask you, you don’t understand about things,” rejoined his sister sagely. “It is for papa to say whether we ought to go or not. Shall we father?”

“What, what is it?” demanded Mr. Jerome hastily, lowering the morning paper behind which he was making believe to eat, and glancing nervously round at the circle of questioning faces. “Whether you should go to school to-day or not? I—I don’t know, Jocelyn, what do you say? You women ought to know best about these things. Do as you think—as you think best; and you, children, do as she tells you. I must be going, myself. I want to be at the office early this morning,” he added in a



confused way, and putting his coffee-cup to his lips, he drained it at one draught, and pushing back his chair abruptly, left the room.

"There now!" said Joe, in the gruff voice with which the poor boy tried to hide his share of the general trouble; "you've driven him off without his breakfast, you magpie. Why couldn't you have kept quiet, and just gone along to school as if you had some sense?"

"I'm not a magpie. I'm a jay just like yourself," retorted Jemima. "Indeed, I'm awful sorry, but papa was only making believe to eat anyhow; I guess he was glad to get away. And besides, Joe, I don't know whether we are to go or not. Are we, Jocelyn?"

"*I* am not, most certainly," announced Juliet's decided voice, while her older sister was considering the matter with a distressed face. "I don't choose to give people the chance to be staring and whispering and asking questions the very day after——"

Her voice broke, the color flushed up into her clear brown cheek; she lowered her dark deep-set eyes to hide the sudden softness that gathered in them.

Jocelyn made an effort to speak with composure.

"You shall do just as you feel about it yourself, dear," she said kindly in an undertone to



Juliet who was sitting near her; then to the other girls, "I think perhaps you had better go, you little ones," she said. "It has got to begin sometime——" here her voice faltered, but she controlled it. "And to-day is as well as another. Every one will be kind, of course, and you have been unsettled long enough."

"All right," acquiesced Jemima easily; she preferred, on the whole, to be up and about in the old busy fashion. But Janet demurred. She did not like to be busy; she did not enjoy school; she loved to hide herself in the depths of a great easy chair in a quiet room, and read or dream over a book.

"I don't see why I should go if Juliet needn't," she protested plaintively. "If you are going to show partiality, Jocelyn—mother always treated us all alike——" she checked herself at sight of the white quivering pain that ran over her sister's face.

"Oh! don't Janet, please," almost entreated poor Jocelyn, feeling as if she could scarcely bear any more. Oh, if only that precious mother were here again! How should she ever make herself fill her place to all these different natures?

"I shall not show partiality, I shall not feel any; don't you know that? But you must let me use my judgment sometimes; Juliet is



older. But you and Jem,—do you think it would be quite kind for you to let Jem go alone?"

"Why can't she stay at home then?" persisted plaintive Janet; "but never mind, Jocelyn, to please you——"

"Yes, and to please me, old Janie," interposed Jem in her brisk, good natured way. "I didn't think you'd go back on me—'t isn't like you. Come on now, let's get our books and things, or it'll be nine o'clock before we get there. I believe you'll like to see the girls again after all!"

"And I will put up your lunch for you while you are getting ready," said Jocelyn, giving them a little tremulous smile, and beginning assiduously to cut sandwiches.

"Humph!" muttered Joe who was strapping his books in the corner. "A fellow is likely to have a nice time in the house with a lot of girls, if they're going on like this every day. Well, good-bye to you," and he marched off with an odd look on his keen plain face, and without any lunch. Joe disdained to "be nibbling at recess like a girl;" he preferred to skirmish with Aunt Peggy, and forage in the pantry when he came home.

Juliet sat through all the bustle of departure, silent at her corner of the table, her clear-cut



features rigid as marble, her deep dark eyes fixed upon her plate; her young breast aching with the stress of mingled painful feelings. This first day—she had taken it into her own hands—but what was she going to do with it—and what was it going to do with her? She lifted her eyes presently and looked askance at her sister. What would the new house-mistress herself do? Jocelyn did not see the glance; she was busy taking off Jessie's bib, and wiping her little sticky fingers. That done, she began to put together the china and silver, making preparations to wash it herself as had been her mother's habit, while Aunt Peggy and Mahaly the "second girl," ate their own breakfast.

"Dessie h'lp you, Dottelyn," exclaimed the little girl, slipping down from her chair, and beginning to gather up the napkins to put them away in their drawer.

"No, no, you'll only hinder, not help," interposed Juliet, rousing herself with an effort. "You run away and play, Jessie, and I'll help with the breakfast things."

She attempted to take the napkins from the child's hands, but Jessie resisted sturdily.

"No, no," she exclaimed; "do 'way, Duly; Dessie always help mamma; Dessie doin' to h'lp Dotty now!"

There was the warning sound of possible tears



in the little excited voice, and her sister gave way to her with a look of vexation.

"Very well," she said in an annoyed tone; "help her then, if you think your help is better than mine; and if she thinks so too. Only, for pity's sake, do stop talking like a baby now you're three years old and more, Jessie; it sounds so silly! Suppose," she added, turning to her older sister, "since I am not wanted here, I go up and clear your things out of the bureau drawers. I suppose you will be moving down stairs—"

She stopped, with a sudden break in her voice, and Jocelyn looked at her with eyes full of starting tears. Oh! these cruel details, these cold realities, which clipped the sore and sensitive hearts as in a vise!

Jocelyn waited a moment, struggling for composure; as soon as she could speak quietly, she said,

"If you will, Juliet. I'll come up and help presently," and the younger sister left the room without further words.

But little Jessie caught the sound of tears in her voice, and came running to nestle her curly head up against her.

"Don't 'ee ky, Dotty," she said in her sweet coaxing voice, and using the infant-patois, which her mother, loath to lose her baby, had never



checked. "Don't 'ee ky, Dottelyn; Dessie keep care o' you now; Dessie s'leep wi' you in mamma's bed. Mamma gone to heaven now, live wi' de angels, an' byme by we be angels too an' go live wif her agen."

The little coaxing arms were about her neck, the rosy loving lips upon her cheek: poor Jocelyn's forced composure gave way, and hiding her face in the sunny curls, she broke into uncontrollable weeping. Only for a moment, for now there began to be a sob in the little voice that begged, "Don't ee ky, Dottelyn; make Dessie ky too! Mamma never ky!" and the older sister hurriedly dried her tears, and made haste to comfort the little frightened soul.

"Dottelyn won't cry any more either darling," she said, kissing away the tears starting in the blue eyes, "Dottelyn will wash the cups and saucers right away, and you shall help her if you're very careful."

"Yes, Dessie 'll be velly careful," said the little creature, lifting her head promptly, ready to begin: "and Dessie 'll be good an' help you all day long!"

The rainbow follows the rain very soon, thank heaven, in childish eyes; and the little creature trotted happily to and fro, holding a cup or a saucer tight in her chubby little fingers, and



Aunt Peggy, coming to the dining-room door for orders, stood watching her with a sort of twisted smile upon her ebony features.

"Hump!" she sniffed, after watching the child's busy and important ways for a minute or two, "I wouldn't feel of as much consequence as you dez ef I was president o' de whole United States an de Confed'cy into de bahgin! —Bettah look out fo' dat ahchany, Miss Jos'lyn; pride gwine suah befo' a fall! Well! heah's de mahketin' books; what ye gwine have fo' din-nah to-day?"

Poor Jocelyn! It was the first time she had chanced to be called upon to give the orders. An aunt of hers, a sister of her father, had been staying with them during the last sorrowful days, and had left for her own family only after the funeral. She had spared her niece the jarring household cares while she was there; but now it behooved the young mistress to address herself to her own business and she found herself shrinking from it with timidity and reluctance.

Jocelyn had never interested herself greatly in household matters. The busy, cheery mother was always there, with whom long habit had made housekeeping easy, and Peggy, like most old servants, was a little "difficult" under youthful authority. There was always a like-



lihood of morning visitors dropping in, on their way home from shopping or marketing in this easy-going Virginia country-town, and some one must be hospitably ready to receive them. Moreover, there was always a supply of sewing on hand in such a family of school-girls, and Jocelyn had a clever "knack" at dressmaking.

So while the young lady daughter busied herself with her sewing, her practicing, made and received calls, and kept up the course of "Old English Authors" with the young people's "Reading Club," her mother had retained the housekeeping in her own capable hands; and Jocelyn found herself growing suddenly nervous at the thought of ordering dinner. What should she send for this morning?

Roast beef? That was a popular dish with most of the family, but she remembered Janet never ate it, and Janet was delicate, and ought to have meat. Leg of lamb? But that Juliet disliked. Poultry—she believed they all liked that, but poultry was scarce and expensive at this season. Beefsteak was always difficult, because some of them liked it very rare, and others very well done. How had her mother managed to suit all these various tastes? thought poor Jocelyn in sore perplexity. She *had* managed it, she knew that, for she could not enjoy her own dinner unless the others



were enjoying theirs, and whether it was quite wise or not, the indulgent mother had always lovingly catered to the several wants.

"It will take a little thought, and coaxing of Aunt Peggy, I suppose, but I shall try. I mean to do my best every way to make them comfortable, as she did."

A sudden thought occurred to her. She turned to Aunt Peggy, who stood waiting with a sort of grim resignation depicted upon her countenance: "Ole Missus never keep her standin' round dis way; done range her dinner in her haid fo' she come down in de mawnin!"

"I think I'll go to market myself, Aunt Peggy," she said; the sad under-thought running in her mind: "The beginning has got to be made sometime. I might as well go out to-day as to-morrow!"

"Then I can see what they have," she continued, "and know better what to order."

The old colored woman's stiff features relaxed.

"Dat's right, Miss Jos'lyn," she vouchsafed to approve. "Dat's de only way to keep house fo' sho. Go round to dem butchers and grocers yo' self, an' look sharp at what dey got, like you knowed better 'bout deir things dan dey do demselves, and keep 'em right up to de mark. Ef you kaint spare de time every



mawnin, why, onct or twict a week will do ; kase dey keep pooty much de same things all de time, anyhow. An' if you send 'em back two, th'ee times when dey try play tricks on ye, dat'll settle 'em : dey'll fine out you ain't green ef you is young. Yo' maw used to go to mahkit ev'y day, kine o' joyed it ; tuk her outen de house an' giv her de air. But you ! laws ha' massy ! You gwine have yo' han's full anyhow, Miss Joslyn, now she's gone. Deed you is, honey ! ”

The quick softness sprang to the young mistress' eyes, and it was a moment or two before she said :

“ Yes, Aunt Peggy. But I have you to help me.”

The drooping glance, the patient voice, the admission of reliance upon her, quite won the old negress' heart, and put to flight any notion of “ stannin' up fo' her rights.” Her wrinkled brown face softened, and her tone was mellow and motherly as she answered heartily :

“ Deed you is got me, honey, an' I gwine see you safe thoo' de wild'ness, please de Lawd. So don't ye fret 'bout nothin', an' run 'long now an' git yo' things on ; an' you too, little Missy, you ax yo' sistah let you go 'long too. She gwine be yo' mammy now.”



Jessie looked up with sparkling eyes. "*May* I go, Dottelyn?" and Jocelyn said "yes."

Juliet glanced out of the window of her room up-stairs as she heard the front door open and shut, and saw her two sisters starting off on their expedition; little Jessie stepping along, holding up her skirts in jaunty fashion, and Jocelyn looking down into the happy little face with almost as bright an answering smile.

"I wonder how they can!" she said bitterly to herself. "It doesn't seem to me as if I could ever smile again!" and she went back with her young face pale and set to her work of clearing out and re-arranging the drawers of the bureau which hitherto she and Jocelyn had shared together. At another time, in other circumstances, this would have been a task which Juliet would have enjoyed. She was unfortunately, of a rather jealous disposition, inclined to look out with suspicious watchfulness for any encroachment of those superior rights which elder sister's are sometimes apt to assume, and the younger equally quick to resent. She was very neat and orderly in all her ways, moreover, and had always coveted the possession of a "top-drawer" all to herself; but now that this long-desired privilege had come to her, the manner and cause of its coming took all the exultation out of it.



Instead of the pleasure she would have supposed she should feel in having all the space she desired to lay out her various little boxes of ribbons and laces, her dainty handkerchief and glove cases, Christmas and birthday gifts from her girl-friends, she experienced, on the contrary, a strange disinclination to displace her sister's pretty belongings; an uncomfortable feeling, as she lifted out of the drawer one after another of Jocelyn's young lady possessions, almost as if Jocelyn herself were being taken away and put out of her sight. She grew really nervous over the work presently, as a long evening glove happened to drop to the floor, and lay there with the shape of the plump arm and tapering fingers moulded in the delicate flesh-tinted kid.

"I don't believe I'll do another thing!" she said to herself excitedly; "I'll wait till Jocelyn comes back, and let her move her things herself. I feel, for all the world, as if I was making something happen to her!" and the girl, unnerved by her overwrought feelings, sat down abruptly upon a chair beside the window and bent her gaze down the long aspen-bordered street. "I wish she'd come along home!" she went on in her thought, as if talking to some one near at hand. "Suppose anything *should* happen to her?—But what foolishness! what



should happen, pray, right here in town, on a bright morning like this?"

And then there came into her consciousness a certain uneasy reflection: "I needn't have had such a mean thought when I saw her going out, as though I had so much finer and deeper feelings than she. I suppose she had to go—to market, or somewhere—and it was nice of her to take poor little Jessie along with her. How pleased the child looked! And she was nice to me this morning about going to school. I suppose if she had objected to my staying, father would have told me I had better go. Just after I had interfered so about the children too. But it does come a little hard to have to mind your own sister, only three years older than yourself! Oh dear! I expect there'll be many a hitch—and there won't be any dear sweet mother to smoothe 'em all away so easily. Well—we must try; I must try, and she must try. It's going to be hard for us both; for her to have to manage, and for me to have to be managed!"

Her glance, upraised, wandered toward a pretty picture framed upon the wall; an etching of two girlish heads, bent smiling toward each other, and beneath, the inscription,

"Little children, love one another."

The mother had hung it there years ago, when



they were first promoted to this large upper chamber; and a chance look at it had served her purpose many a time, of checking an incipient dispute, or angry reproach; and now, she being dead, it yet spoke.

"So we will love one another," said Juliet half aloud, almost as if answering an actual voice; "God helping us," she added in the silence of her young heart, where a deep and strong religious feeling, inculcated from her earliest years, contested the ground with certain stubborn natural tendencies and morbid growths.

"And I won't be silly any longer, but go on with this work. Jocelyn will have enough to do, even after I have cleared out her things and taken them down-stairs. Heigho! I don't believe I shall be half as glad of a room to myself as I thought I should. I shall miss her, I know, and the talks we used to have over things in bed. I wonder why people can't ever be satisfied with things as they are? Or is it only you, J. J., who are always discontented?"

She got up from her chair, with another look down the leafless vista of gnarled old aspens, and addressed herself anew to her task of separating her sister's possessions from her own, and placing them in convenient piles to be



taken below. For Jocelyn in her sad new dignity as mistress of the house, was to be promoted to her mother's room, so as to be within one flight of stairs from the housekeeping regions, while her father had arranged to occupy a smaller apartment on the same floor.

"I could not sleep there, without her," he had urged when his daughter protested against dispossessing him, and had hurried into his study to escape further discussion; so now the dear old familiar aspect of the room was to be more or less changed; the sacred belongings of the mother were to be removed from bureau and table and closet, to be tenderly handled and laid reverently away as the most precious heritage of her children; and the daughter, wistful, reluctant, full of tender tears, and brave smiles, and humble prayers for help and guidance, was to take the mother's place as best she might!

She found Juliet busy, going up-stairs and down-stairs, with her arms full of things when she returned from her marketing with little Jessie.

"Oh, what's you doin', Du'let? let me help you; I want to carry somesin';" cried the sturdy little creature, not in the least tired with her expedition, and liking better to trot about than to sit still.



"Oh no, you can't; you'll only drop them," objected Juliet impatiently, rather overwrought by all she had been thinking; and feeling as if it would be a sort of sacrilege to have any of these banished belongings run the risk of falling on the floor.

"No, I won't drop 'em at all! I can hold 'em just as tight! Mayn't I, Dottelyn?" appealed the child, and her sister hastened to say:

"Oh, I think Du'let will let you if you promise to be velly careful. Poor Du'let must be tired running up and down-stairs with her arms full. Let me take those things from you, dear——"

Her look and tone were so sweet and winsome that Juliet could not take offence at being overruled. Quick to err, she was as quick to repent, and she felt ashamed now of her lack of consideration for others.

"All right then," she consented; and Jocelyn added:

"Come up with us, and I'll fill a little basket for you, so you won't drop things."

"Jocelyn is more like mother after all than ever I shall be," thought Juliet ruefully at this; and the thought helped to keep her patient and gentle all through the long morning's work when she and her sister continued to be busy long after little Jessie had given



up tired, and curled herself up on the lounge for a nap.

When at length the loving sorrowful task was finished, the two sisters stood for a moment, gazing wistfully around the altered room. They had brought the little picture down by mutual consent.

"We will all gather in here as we used to," said Jocelyn tenderly, "and it will help us."

Now as their glance fell upon it, they turned toward each other with a common impulse and threw their arms about each other's shoulders.

"O Juliet! O Jocelyn!" was all they said; but as the sound of the children's voices coming home from school was heard below, the younger sister escaped up to her own room, feeling that for the present, at least, there was no jealousy of the elder in her heart.



## CHAPTER III.

### A DAY OF IT.

JULIET decided to go to school herself the next morning. It cost her a struggle, for her sensitive and brooding nature especially disliked the thought of her appearance and conduct being noticed, and her feeling speculated upon at such a time.

"Don't I know how girls talk?" she said irritably to herself as she walked along, silent and repellant, beside quiet Janet and chattering Jem.

"One will say 'Poor thing! doesn't she bear it well?'"

"And another will answer, 'yes, so well, it hardly looks as if she minded it much.' Oh, I've heard 'em," and the pure proud curves of her face set themselves as rigidly as though chiselled in marble.

"Mercy! Jule looks as if she had swallowed a ramrod, doesn't she?" whispered Jem to Janet, as her sister's tall, straight young figure passed stiffly before them up the school-house steps. "What's the use of looking as though a



body were biting a file? Every one was just as sweet and kind as could be to us yesterday; weren't they?"

"Juliet takes everything so hard," observed Janet contemplatively: and indeed the rigid young censor found that she had been unduly suspicious of her mates. No one stared at her when she entered the school-room, or watched her with curious glances, nor could she detect any sign of critical comment.

"Oh, there's Juliet Jerome! I'm so glad she's back again!" cried her desk-mate, pretty Margie Bland, jumping down from the window-seat upon which she was perched (for the nine o'clock bell had not sounded as yet), and running to welcome her with a kiss. Others of her school-friends gathered around her, each with a pleasant, cordial greeting. Miss Brandon and Miss Clarissa Brandon, the two middle-aged sisters, representatives of an old family fallen into decayed fortunes since the "War," who announced themselves in the circulars as "Principal and Vice-principal of the Oakleigh Young Ladies' Seminary," each bestowed upon her a formal but affectionate salute; and she found herself slipping back into her accustomed place again as quietly as the wavelet resumes its regular flow after the displacement by a pebble.



Books were produced ; a half dozen kindly hands offered to show where the lesson was, and the young girl found herself taking up life and its duties again in much the old fashion, notwithstanding the aching sense of loss that every now and then forced itself into the pauses of study and recitation.

In the meanwhile, Jocelyn at home was dividing herself as best she could among the varied demands upon her time and attention. She had intended to go over the linen closet and china cupboards with Mahaly that morning, and inform herself as to their contents ; for she had scarcely a more accurate knowledge as to the number of sheets and pillow-cases, towels and napkins, in the house than did one of her sisters ; nor yet, how many pieces remained intact of the old blue china which had been her mother's pride, and that of her mother before her. The rage for decoration had reached Oakleigh, even in its out-of-the-world situation in the peninsula of Virginia ; and Jocelyn had herself painted a set of cups and saucers in delicate imitation of the wild flowers and grasses that grew in the meadows all about the town, for her mother's last birthday, and had sent them to Norfolk to be " fired." She knew of their well-being ; and that there were none missing, torn, or scorched, of the dozen fine



damask napkins which she had saved her pocket-money to buy for her mother's Christmas—only a couple of months ago!—and had embroidered with such loving pride the family “J” in her very daintiest stitches. But she knew it behooved her now to possess a more extended knowledge than this of the household stores, and she had planned to acquire it that day with Mahaly's assistance. Fate however, in the shape of Aunt Peggy, and little Jessie intervened to obstruct this laudable purpose.

“Miss Jos'lyn,” said the old cook, appearing at the dining-room door with her head tied up, just as her young mistress was preparing to have Mahaly reach down the best dinner-service from the upper shelves of the corner-cupboard; “We got cole meat for dinnah to-day, ye know, honey; an' yo' maw she alwez 'lotted to have dessert on cole meat days. De chillen counts on it, an' yo' paw, he's got a sweet tooth too, an' he needs chirkin' up like, po' man. He cert'n'y do look down in de mouf, an I don' know nuffin' like one o' yo' maw's mince pies to sot him up. But laws honey, I kaint roll out no past'y to-day, not ef my salvation 'pended on it. I got de wus' mis'ry in my haid evah I had since I was bawned. S'pose it's jes' speckilatin' 'bout de 'sponsibility 'wolv'in' on me all suddent-like wi' dis yer family; but



whah' s'evah it is, it's clar disobligated me, 'deed it has, fo' sho; an' you'll jes' have to make de pie crust yo'se'f."

"O dear, Aunt Peggy!" cried Jocelyn, turning a dismayed look toward the mahogany countenance, shining out brown and wrinkled from its white wrappings. "But I don't know how to make pie-crust! I never made any in my life; and I'm so busy to-day. Can't we have a pudding, or a custard, or something like that, that's easier made, and quicker?"

"H'mph!" snorted the old colored woman. "An' dez ye know any mo' 'bout puddins an' custards dan you dez 'bout pie-crust, Miss Jos'lyn? One's jes' as peticklah as de oddah, fo' dey all depends on de jinin' togeddah of de 'gregences in de right way. An' ye'll nevah leahn de right way no youngah, Miss Jos'lyn. You come along out in de kitchen now, fo' my haid gits to rippin' an' tearin' any wuss, an' I'll show ye how to mix the dough, an' roll it aout, an' den any body what wa'n't a natchel-bawn idjit could finish de pies. An' dat-ah mince-meat ought to be eat up fo' de weddah gits wahn. "Come along, Miss Jos'lyn."

"Can't—can't you make pastry, Mahaly?"

The colored girl gave her head a little toss: "Ef aun' Peggy wa'ant so pudjecky—" she began, but the old woman interrupted her



haughtily; "Yes, but she is jes dat ah, an' she don' want none o' yo' projeckin' roun' her kitchen. You got all you can' tend to with yo' house-wuk an' yo' back ha'r."

"Now Miss Jos'lyn, don't ye hear that?" rejoined the house-maid angrily, putting her hand up to the woolly knob into which she had succeeded in training her kinky black locks. "She's always a-quarrelin', aunt Peggy is; she can't let nobody alone; an' she's jest jealous 'cause I wear my hair like white folks, and don't talk like I was a corn-field nigger. But I wan't never no slave, I'll have her to know!"

"You good-for-nothin' sassy, impident yallah-gal!" Aunt Peggy started forward, her glossy dark face fairly quivering with wrath, but her young mistress interposed, lifting her hand with a gesture of authority. "That will do, both of you," in a tone of dignified rebuke, "I am surprised at you."

"Well, Miss Jos'lyn, you s'pose I ain' gwine-ter let that saddle-colored critter know 'at I'm as free as she, or any her 'lations dah to be!"

"You may be free in that sense, Peggy, but I'm afraid, you are both of you slaves to your tempers, and your self-opinion, and they are about as bad masters as any one can have. I should think you would be ashamed of yourselves, beginning this way, so soon——"



The young lady's voice trembled, and the old negress was instantly filled with compunction.

"Dah den, dah den, honey," she said, her angry tones mellowing, and speaking as the black nurses soothe a fretful baby. "Don' ye mine what sech as we-uns talk; 'cose we oughter be 'shame o' ourse'ves, an' cose we is too. You come along naow wi' yer ole Aun' Peggy, an' you, Miss Mahaly Byrd, you jes git dat ah cedah piggin' full o' hot watah, an' wash up dis yeh chany so'st Miss Jos'lyn can count it 'dout silin her pooty white fingahs, an' mine you don' break none of it, not so much as chip it de least little bit, kase if you do——"

"There, never mind, Peggy; I'll give Mahaly her orders," interposed Jocelyn quietly, and the old servant, with a curious subdued air, yet flashing a sardonic glance out of her rolling white and black eyes over her shoulder toward the "yallah-gal," walked out into the kitchen. Her young lady lingered a moment, "you will be very careful, Mahaly, won't you," she said, a little anxiously. "You know my mother ——"

"Laws, yes indeed, Miss Jocelyn, cert'ny I'll be careful," the girl hastened to assure her, in a very different tone from that she had previously used. "I know how much store your



ma set by this here chiny, an' I'm goin' to handle it jest as if it was jooels. Don't ye be afraid now; and don't ye mine what that old—what *she* says, I mean," hastily checking herself, and nodding her tightly-braided head toward the kitchen.

"But I do mind it," insisted Jocelyn, kindly but firmly. "Do you suppose it is pleasant to me to think that such bickering is likely to be going on in any part of my household? And is it respectful to me to quarrel in that way in my presence? I am quite sure you would not have done so in my mother's; and it is my intention to have the family conducted in just the same orderly and pleasant way as she did. I should think you would prefer it too; I should think you would rather help me than hinder me just now, when—when everything is coming upon me——"

There was again the little threatened break in the sweet full voice, and the strong, self-opinionated young colored girl was moved to a certain compassionate sympathy.

"And so I do want to help you, Miss Jos'lyn, 'deed I do, all I can. Ole Aunt Peggy's awful cantankerous, but I'll try not to mind her, 'deed I will. An, as for you, Miss Jos'lyn, why you mustn't be so-'fraid like of yourself. A great tall well-made smart young lady like



you, why you can do anything. Why, you're higher than your ma was a-reddy, and stout an' strong, an' quick enough to learn things, I'll be bound, soon as ye set your hand to 'em. Just see how beautiful ye can sew, an' embroider an' paint, an' play on the piano, an' all the likes o' that? Why shouldn't ye learn to make pastry then, an' everything else when you git your hand in? Just don't you be discouraged now, Miss Jos'lyn, nor let that old—let Aunt Peggy, I mean, take on too many airs a-learnin' ye, and you'll see everything 'll go on just as slick as it used to, in a little while. Don't ye worry now about this chiny; you'll find it all safe and sound when you git ready to 'numerate it."

The young lady had stood listening to her with a little half-impatient smile at her handmaiden's tone of pitying encouragement. But her sense of relief at finding that she was capable of making her authority promptly submitted to, and her appreciation of the really sympathetic feeling manifested for her, overcame her perception of the rather too-evident patronage.

"How blessed a thing it is," she thought gladly, "that a 'soft answer turneth away wrath.' I suppose if I had scolded—but mother never scolded, and oh, I hope I never shall!—And I do want these people to stay on



with us: I should hate to change anything of mother's, and Aunt Peggy has been with us so long, and Mahaly is a good, competent girl, and I do think it is nice to have one's servant stay with you, and get to be like part of the family."

She gave the young mulatto a smile from which the impatience had all gone, said "very well then, Mahaly, I'll trust them to you," and proceeded with a composed mien, but a heart inwardly apprehensive as a child's, to make her first essay in that crucial test of the culinary art, pastry.

Aunt Peggy was sitting in front of the stove when the young lady entered, nursing her "neurology" over the fire. She turned round upon her stool with a grunt and said a little shortly,

"Well, I'm glad you got shet o' all dat prologuin' an' cum at last, Miss Jos'lyn. Dah's de flou' an de shawtnin', buttah, an' lahd, bofe I ginally uses—an' a titch o' yeast-powdah, an' all de ingregences, I sot 'em all out on de table fo' ye. I 'lowed 'twas bettah fo' ye to learn to mix de dough, an' evrythin, f'om de beginnin'. You jes take an' stir a pinch o' salt, an' a pinch o' bakin'-powdah in de middle o' de flou'——"

"But how much is a 'pinch', Aunt Peggy?" demanded Jocelyn, laughing a little nervously.



“Your ‘pinch’ and mine might be different, mightn’t they?”

The old woman chuckled. “Specs maybe my ole fum an’ fingah *could* pick up mor’n yourn,” she answered. “Well, den, a haffen a spoonful o’ salt an’ a even whole spoonful o’ powdah; stir ‘em aroun’ in de flou’, an’ den make a leetle hole in de pile, an’ po’ in a leetle ice-watah, few draps at a time; some rubs paht o’ de shawtnin’ in fust, but I’ll back my pie-crust against anybody’s dis side o’ de bay anyhaow. Ole Cunnel Gyah’son, he uster say——”

“But Aunt Peggy, I can’t remember if you keep on telling so much at a time. Which shall I do—put in the shortening first or not, and how much? I’m in a hurry, you know.”

The old cook gave a snort of mingled pain and vexation.

“Naow look a-hyeh, Miss Jos’lyn,” she said impressively; “dey wan’t nevah no pie-crus’ fitten to eat made in a hurry. Yo’ maw could ha’ tole you dat, ef evah she’d ha’ undahtuk to teach ye. Fo’ de law, I dunno why she didn’ an’ you a great big growed young lady, mos’ ready to think about gittin’ marr’d, an’ havin’ a house o’ yo’ own to look artah!”

Jocelyn turned severely toward the old servant.

“That will do, Peggy,” she said. “You will



be good enough not to criticise my mother to me—nor to yourself. There was plenty for both of us to do; she divided it as she thought best, and——”

“Laws, Miss Jos'lyn, I ain't a-thinkin' o' findin' fault with nobody, least o' all with yo' deah maw; on'y, honey, if you wants to make good pastry you mus' take yo' time——”

“Take her time to what, Aunt Peggy?”

Little Jessie came running into the kitchen with an aggrieved countenance. “Where you bin, Dottelyn? Dessie look for you everywhere; couldn't find you at all. Oh,” with a sudden brightening of the little clouded face; “goin' to make pies? Let Dessie help you; give Dessie some mince-meat; mamma used to.”

“Did she?” asked her sister rather doubtfully. “Seems to me it's rather rich for you, little girl. But if I give a little, will you be right good and quiet and let me go on with my work?”

“Yes, Dessie be good,” assented the little one, graciously, and Jocelyn set her up in a chair beside the table, and gave her a spoonful of mince-meat in a saucer, first picking out the bits of suet carefully.

“I guess just the fruit and meat won't hurt her, she's such a sturdy little thing,” she said, half questioningly to Aunt Peggy; but the



old woman only sniffed again and muttered "Kitchen ain't no place fo' chillen, nohow. Mine, naow—not too much buttah, Miss Jocelyn, makes it tough. An' ye wants to spread it on smooove with a cold knife."

By this time Jocelyn had got the dough mixed and was kneading it lightly with her cool deft fingers. As she began to roll it out in thin layers and spread them alternately with butter and with lard, Jessie, who had disposed of her mince-meat, put in another plea.

"I want some too to roll out on my board wif my little rollin'-pin. Can't I have some, Dottelyn?"

She jumped down to run and fetch her little implements from her baby-house, and Jocelyn good-humoredly broke off a piece of the dough and made room for her little board upon a corner of the table. This contented the little one for a few minutes again, and Jocelyn improved the opportunity to line her pie-pans with her own pastry, fill them from the great stone-jar, and trim off the rims evenly under Aunt Peggy's directions.

"They look as if they'd be light and nice, don't they?" she said, holding one of them up with a pleased and eager face. "Now let me put them in the oven, myself, Aunt Peggy, and watch the baking, so I can feel I really know



how ;” and the old cook moved away with a grim smile and let her do as she desired.

The proper baking of mince-pies requires a certain amount of time and attention, and this Jocelyn was eager now to give them ; but Jessie felt disposed to object.

“Dessie don’t want you to stay an’ bake de pies,” she whined. “Dessie want you to go up-stairs wif her an’ make her dolly a new frock, an’ fix her somesin’ to play party, an’ tell her a story, an’——”

“O my !” smiled her sister, putting her hand playfully over the little rosy pouting face. “All those things at once, petty ?—But sister’s so tired, you know ; she wants to sit down now and rest. You roll up your dough now into little ducks ; pinch out the bill and the feet, and I’ll slip them into the oven between my pies and bake them for you.”

“You say *your* pies, just the way Aunt Peggy does,” commented the child shrewdly. “Ain’t they my pies too, an’ everybody’s pies ? Are you so proud ’cause you made ’em ?” and Jocelyn found herself actually coloring before the keen little blue eyes.

“I only hope they’ll turn out nice enough to be worth anybody’s claiming,” she said. “Now, Missy, do you want me to help you with your ducks !”



They were made and put in the oven, and then the restless little creature looked about for something else to while away the time of waiting.

"You ain't doin' nosin' else to 'muse me," she said, coming and leaning against her sister's knee. "I want you to tell me a story; tell me about the Three Bears."

"Oh!" said Jocelyn, pinching the rosy cheeks. "Why you know that story better than I do! You tell it to me, that's a nice child."

"O dear! it's so velly much trouble!" sighed the little one, stretching her plump arms up above her head. "Well, be very quiet then, and listen

" 'Silver-hair was a little girl,  
'Lufly an' good: ' "

and so she went through all the quaint little story, told in pretty verse, and made "cunninger" than ever by the little broken tongue.

"H—mph!" grunted Aunt Peggy, who had been listening with a distorted grin upon her brown, pain-drawn face. "Any child dat can reel off all dem words 'dout a bit of a book ought to be at school wi' de oddah chillen, not bodderin' roun in de kitchen, whah dey's bakin' goin' on."



"I ain't botherin', am I, Dottelyn? An' you know you like to hear it, Aunt Peggy. I'll say you another now 'bout de chillun in de Wood if you be good an' listen."

She straightened out her little skirts with her hand, made believe to clear her throat, and began again in the sweetest, little, plaintive tone:

"My dear, do you know  
That a long time ago,  
Two poor little chillens, whose names I don't  
know—"

But Jessie had the tenderest little heart in the world; she never could get through this most pathetic of nursery lyrics without making several pauses for "little weeps" by the way; and by the time the "robins so red had over them spread" the immemorial strawberry-leaves, there was a smell of "browning" from the stove, and the whole kitchen was full of a tempting fruity and cidery odor.

"O Aunt Peggy, I believe my pies must be done!" cried Jocelyn, jumping up suddenly, and opening the door of the oven to peep in.

"Yes, they are, just as brown and crisp as they can be! I can take them out, can't I? Oh, they do look nice, don't they? I'm so glad!"



The old woman grunted: "Sich a fuss about a couple o' mince-pies! 'Cose dey's all right when dey made unner my d'reckshuns." She was just as much pleased as her young lady, but it wasn't Aunt Peggy's way to show it. "You needn't bodder about clarin' up, Miss Jos'lyn. I'll right up de table myse'f; my haid's gittin' bettah, I reckon de linimin's a-takin' hole o' de mis'ry pow'ful."

But Jocelyn insisted upon "clarin' up" her own disorder, and leaving the kitchen in its usual comfortable order; and then forgetting to be tired in the pleasure of her success, she returned to the dining-room, and duly went over the tale of the "blue china," making herself familiar with the exact number of cups and saucers, plates and dishes, and seeing that all was duly set back in order upon the freshly-scoured shelves.

Before this was fairly finished, Jessie who had stayed behind in the kitchen to "'muse poor Aunt Peggy, tellin' her anoder little 'tory 'bout Red Ridin'-Hood," came trotting in again, demanding to be amused herself.

"She was hungry; she wanted to play party;" and Jocelyn, tender over 'mother's baby,' got out some bread and jam and milk, and pleased the child by eating her own lunch with her off her dolly's china plates. These



were to be washed up then, and this Jessie desired to do herself; "mamma always wanted me to," she said solemnly, and Jocelyn good-humoredly poured water for her into a basin, and pinned a towel in front of her white apron.

"I could have done it myself with one quarter the time and trouble," she sighed inwardly, as she emptied the basin afterward and wiped up the water which Jessie had profusely spilled. "But of course it is right for the child to learn, and it amuses her. Only, mother dear! how much patience you must have had with all of us—me as well as the others!"

She had occasion to verify this conviction many times in the course of the afternoon, as the tireless little creature, declining to go to sleep—"she was dittin' too big now for day-naps"—trotted about after her from closet to chest, pulling at this and that, interrupting her in the midst of her counting of sheets and pillow-cases, mixing up the piles of towels and napkins, and generally hindering where she insisted upon helping.

Jocelyn was on the point of losing patience with her more than once, but that very word "hindering," coming to her lips, checked and prevented her. She remembered some little verses, cut from a newspaper-corner, she had



picked up once in her mother's work-basket. It was another mother's pitiful plaint for the

“little hindering thing”

who had slipped away out of her path forever; and Jocelyn thinking “Oh, what should *we* do without our baby!” and knowing her mother must have had the same thought when she cut out and kept the little verses, checked the impulse to a hasty word, and was as patient and loving with “mother's baby” as mother could have been herself.

She was very tired however when the others came in from school at three o'clock, and came rushing up-stairs, as was their wont, to “mother's room.” She would have been glad if they would have taken the little one off her hands for awhile, but Janet had a headache—poor Janet! she was subject to headaches—and came and pulled a stool up to Jocelyn's knee, and wanted her to “rub it with camphor, and press her hands on it hard, the way mother did.”

Jem had a budget of all sorts of school-room news which Jocelyn must listen to and be interested in; and Joe came swinging up-stairs, three steps at a time, in a fine fit of indignation: “he wanted something good for lunch, and that mean old Aunt Peggy wouldn't let



him have anything but bread and cheese. Mightn't he get out some sweet potatoes, and make a fire out in the back yard and roast 'em?"

"Why Joe, dear, dinner will be ready before they would be done enough to eat," his sister expostulated.

"Yes, an' we doin' to have sumpin' dood for dinner!" interposed little Jessie with a triumphant air, proud of her secret and of her share in "helping" about the mince-pies.

"Oh well, I don't care! Some baby doings I expect, bread-pudding, or something like that! I'd rather have the sweet potatoes, it's such fun roasting 'em; there's another fellow out there; I told him we could; mother used to let us, Jocelyn!"

"Very well," yielded his sister in a resigned tone: the children shouldn't miss their mother any more than she could help! "But be careful, Joe, about the fire, don't build it near the house or fence; and don't take too many, and above all, don't bother Aunt Peggy, for she's not feeling well to-day!"

"No, no—yes—yes—" called back Joe, as he went sliding down the bannister; and then, before Jocelyn had had time to change her morning-dress, there was a ring at the door, and Mahaly came up.



“Mr. Jordan would like to see you, Miss Jos’lyn, if it’s convenient.”

Now Mr. Jordan was the minister, and had been well-beloved of the mother; Jocelyn could not think of denying herself to him when he had kindly made time to call so soon. Her heart began to palpitate at the thought of what must perforce be a melancholy meeting, and of keeping him waiting while she made some necessary changes in her dress. She welcomed the vision of Juliet passing the door as she was hurriedly slipping from one garment into another, and called to her in a nervous voice:

“Juliet, you are all in order, dear, won’t you go down and see Mr. Jordan a few minutes till I can get ready? I shan’t be but a little while——”

“Mr. Jordan!” Juliet repeated the name in a tone of dismayed objection. “Oh, I can’t, Jocelyn! I never know what to say to ministers, and I can’t talk about——about——You ought to be dressed by this time yourself!”

“Never mind,” said the older sister, restraining herself with an effort; but Jem did not choose to let it pass.

“And you ought to be ashamed of yourself to be so disobliging, Jule,” she said. “I don’t suppose Jocelyn has had a chance to get dressed



yet with all there is to see to about the house. And the idea of being afraid of Mr. Jordan because he's a minister! Ministers are just like other people, only they're *gooder*. Anyhow, why should you think it's easier for Jocelyn to talk about—things—than you——”

“And why should you think it necessary to put in your word at all, Miss Pert?” was the angry retort. “It is you who are disagreeable, always meddling, calling me *Jule* when you know I don't like it!”

“Oh well, if you want to be so young ladi-fied in one thing you ought in another,” rejoined the irrepressible. “I'll go down, Jocelyn, if you'd like to have me. I like Mr. Jordan ever so much; he always speaks to me so nicely, I'm not afraid of him!”

“Yes, I'd like to have you,” assented Jocelyn, hastily buttoning her basque. “And there's something else you know I'd like, Jem,” she added in a lower tone, “for you to curb that quick little tongue of yours!”

The little girl shrugged her shoulders, and sent a glance half merry, half mischievous, after Juliet's retreating figure. “Well, I'll see about it,” she compounded, “and now I'm going to tell Mr. Jordan you'll be down in a minute.”

“Tate me wif you; I want to go too,” little



Jessie put in her plea. "Dottelyn turled my hair all pitty, an' I dot a tlean ap'on on."

"All right, come ahead," agreed Jem; and Janet stood up and fastened a hair-pin into the loosened tresses which Jocelyn had not had time to re-arrange.

When the elder sister got down into the parlor, she found Miss Jessie perched upon the pastor's knee and looking shyly up into his face while he smiled at her artless prattle; Jem stood by his chair, not at all abashed, and indeed there was nothing but the kindest sympathy and gentleness in his manner to all of them. Jocelyn found her nervousness presently soothed and quieted by the grave tenderness of his words and looks; and when, just before going he said, "Shall we kneel a moment and ask our heavenly Father's help and blessing for all of us?" she felt that the memory of that simple, solemn prayer would remain with her always to comfort and to make her strong.

She needed help just then, poor girl, more than even she herself was aware. Her father came in from his office just as Mr. Jordan was leaving. He looked worn and jaded, and Jocelyn was glad that Mahaly announced dinner a few minutes later.

"He never will take time for lunch," she said to herself, "and he looks just faint with



hunger. I'm so glad I made his favorite dessert, and it turned out so well!"

She hastened up-stairs to gather the young folks promptly to the table, and did her best to keep up a round of cheerful talk. When the first course was removed, the cloth duly brushed, and Mahaly came in bringing the pies, nicely browned and powdered with sugar, a murmur of pleasure arose from the younger members, and the father's grave looks brightened a little involuntarily. The color came to Jocelyn's cheeks, and she could not help a little inward thrill as she carefully made her first essay in what is not so easy to a novice, the cutting it into neat and regular portions.

When the last one was served, before she began to taste her own, she sent a glance of shy inquiry from under her long lashes round the table. To her consternation she saw at once that the touch of pleased expectation had left her father's face, and he was regarding his plate with a look of perplexity; Joe had deliberately scooped out the rich and fragrant "filling" from his crust, and was devouring it with gusto; Janet was doing the same, more delicately; Juliet was leaning back in her chair, merely playing with her knife and fork, and with an inscrutable look on her chiseled feat-



ures; and only Jem was going through hers, crust and all, with sturdy loyalty.

"What—what is the matter?" faltered the young house-mistress, the color deepening in her cheek. "Isn't the pastry tender? I made it just as Aunt Peggy told me—"

"It is tender—yes, dear," answered her father in a puzzled tone. "But there seems to be something lacking—"

"I should think so," put in Joe, with his mouth full of raisins. "It's as flat——"

"Dear father, they lack salt," quoted Janet quaintly from a little poem she had read in a magazine not long before. Janet had a ready quotation for almost everything.

"*Salt!*" repeated Jocelyn in dismay. "Why surely I put in the salt!"

She hastily carried a bit of the white fleaky crust to her mouth: no, it was as Joe had said, "flat" indeed. The poor girl's face reddened with mortification. "I'm sorry, father," she said with an effort. "It was very careless of me. Have some more of the mince-meat—that is good."

"Yes, I reckon so;" again put in Joe, as though he should say "small credit to *you* for that!" But Jessie, catching the sound of tears in her sister's voice broke in even before Jem could speak:



"It's all my fault, Janet, 'cause I was bodder-in' her, wasn't I, Dottelyn? an' you san't anybody make her feel bad 'bout de ole pies. Eat 'em wifout de crust; dat's de way I'm doin'."

Joe giggled, but hushed quickly at his father's grave glance.

"Why 'of course no one shall make sister feel badly; it is you, little one, who must not 'bodder her,'" he said with the indulgent smile no one could ever refuse to 'mother's baby.' "And really, daughter, there is nothing for you to be disturbed about; I think for a first effort your pastry is very creditable indeed, and next time Missy there mustn't put things out of your mind. As for the rest of you, you must remember that it is the salt of kindness and good-will and consideration and forbearance that is needed to season family life, and the lack of which matters a great deal more than its accidental absence even in our favorite mince-pies. Yes, dear, I will have a little more of the meat, and next time I don't doubt but that the crust will be all right."

When Mahaly carried the news of the mishap into the kitchen, old Aunt Peggy relieved her feelings by a more emphatic grunt than usual.

"Dah now!" she exclaimed, "ain't dat ah enuff to tarrify de haht ouden a stone? Artah



all de trubble I tuk a showin' her too ! I jes wish I done make de pies myse'f, spite o' de misery in my haid. All accyount o' datah youngster ; orter bin sot' daown in a cheer to studdy her book, 'stid o' makin' ducks outen dough right at de same table. Miss Jos'lyn too saft-hearted, jes like her maw ; gwine spile dat chile, naow you see ef she don't. Laws-a-massy ! nobody nevah spilt me when I was a young un ; 'twas a word an' a blow wi' my ole mammy, de lawd res' her soul ! ”

“ Well, it didn't make you no happier, nor no sweeter dispositioned, did it, Aunt Peggy ? ” inquired her fellow-servant in a significant tone. “ Don't you worry now 'bout Miss Jos'lyn ; she's got a power o' sense for all she's so sweet. She feels kind o' tender just now over them chillen, but she's a-goin' to bring 'em through just right, now you mind what I tell you ! ”

And for a wonder, Aunt Peggy did not gainsay her.

In the meantime the object of their discussion had taken the opportunity of the general rising from the table to slip out of the dining-room, and through the hall into the dusky window-recess of the parlor ; where screened from the rest of the room by heavy curtains she might find a chance to relieve her over-charged feelings by a few natural tears. Jocelyn had



never been one of the "weeping kind" of girls; her mother used to say in happy confidence to her father that her disposition was as sweet and round as a ripe cocoanut. She could bear to make mistakes, to be teased about them, to recognize them herself, and cheerfully to try to amend them, instead of feeling injured and miserable if they were alluded to: but she was tired now; she felt disappointed, and a little discouraged. The sense of responsibility, and the fear lest she should not be adequate to its proper discharge, weighed upon her spirits; and she could not resist the relief of a few secret tears.

She was allowed to indulge them undisturbed for awhile, for the younger ones were occupied elsewhere. Janet had taken refuge in a book as usual; Joe was undertaking to initiate Jem in the magic art of sharpening a pencil properly; and Juliet had followed her father into the study with a difficult sentence in her Virgil which she could not construe to her satisfaction.

Jessie had trotted out into the kitchen to give Aunt Peggy her complacent explanation of the failure of the dessert; but not finding much approval there, and used at this idle after-dinner hour to make herself cozy in her mother's lap, she set out on a search for her mother-sister.



"Where is Dottelyn? I want to be tooked up an' cuddled—" she queried plaintively of the group who had gathered round the evening-lamp.

"Oh do let Jocelyn have a minute's peace, won't you?" interposed Jem as the child, not seeing her, was going on toward the parlor to look there for her. "Come back, Jessie, that's a dear! I'll take you up and cuddle you if you'll let me!"

But the little one, feeling lost and lonely, went on her way without reply. Some instinct drew her baby feet to the window where her sister sat crying softly to herself, and wishing, oh how pitifully! that she had her mother's dear bosom on which to shed her tears—only then, the tears would not wish to come! In an instant a little pair of soft plump arms were about her neck; a little anxious voice was pleading at her ear,

"Dottelyn! is oo kyin', Dottelyn? What oo kyin' bout, honey? make Dessie ky too pitty soon."

And then as there came a last little sobbing outburst,

"Don't ee ky, Dottelyn; *p'ease* don't, an' I dive oo—I dive oo my ittle dis'es!"

Now the sacrifice of these, her most precious possession, would have been the last expression



of devotion on Jessie's part, and her sister's heart was touched to the quick.

"You little blessed!" she cried half hysterically, and snatched the child up to her breast. "Sister wouldn't take your dear little dis'es, but sister loves you, and she won't be naughty and cry any more."

She rocked her softly to and fro, and comforted her "as one whom his mother comforteth," and the little one clung to her in all confidence and love.

"Would Jessie like Dottelyn to take her upstairs and put her to bed and sing her to sleep?" she asked presently, stroking the curly yellow locks.

But Jessie was learning a lesson of unselfishness too.

"No—o," she said, with not a little effort. "Oo's tired, I know, an' I'm goin' to let Jem put me to bed. She said she would, an' I ain't goin' to keep her to sing me to s'leep, 'cause she's got her lessons to learn. I'm jus' goin' to s'leep my own self like a dood girl. So kiss me good-night, Dottelyn, dear."

"And that is being a good girl, too," endorsed Jem, who had only waited to finish her pencil before following her. "You come along now with Jem, and see what a pretty story she'll tell you!"



They trotted away happily together, and the elder sister stretched her tired arms up above her head, "What a day I've had of it!" she half said, half sighed. "But I shall get used to it by and by, and take it easily as mother did. And I ought not to mind anything when I have such comforters as those two dear little things. Heigho! I must go into the sitting-room, and see what the others are about. Mother never kept away all by herself."

She stretched her arms again, and prepared to leave her comfortable nook; but just at that moment she saw a vision, and heard a sound, which—she could not for the life of her told the reason why!—made her sink back again in her seat, and hold her hands to her bosom to press back a certain sudden tumultuous thrill.

Yet the vision was only that of a familiar figure going round to the side entrance of the house, and the sound that of a familiar voice in the next apartment.



## CHAPTER IV.

### COMING AND GOING.

“HEY-O! How’s everybody?”

It was the old familiar greeting which had been heard in the Jay family’s sitting-room any hour of the day or evening about as far back as its younger members recollected anything. Certainly Jocelyn could scarcely remember the time when people had not smilingly spoken to her of Dick Fairfax, the doctor’s nephew, as her “little sweetheart;” and as the other girls had emerged one after another from the toddle-kin stage, he had included them also in his pretty boyish gallantries. He had served as their escort-in-general to all the small festivities of their childhood, and was always to be counted upon to see them home from evening meeting, lecture, or sociable. He had been in the habit of coming to their mother—poor fellow, he had lost his own parents when he was a little chap in “short trousers”—with all his small joys and sorrows, hopes and fears.

“Uncle Steve is awful jolly, you know,” he would say naïvely; “but he’d only make fun o’



me, Mrs. Jerome, if I came bothering him with school fusses and things; and as for Cousin Oriana, why, she never had any little boys of her own, and she don't know. Now you do always know just what I mean and just what to say to me; and 'deed an 'deed, I'm mighty glad I've got you all to come to!"

Mr. Jerome had got as used to seeing the bright-faced lad about the house and grounds as if he were his own, and was one of the first to miss him if he happened to stay away for any length of time. And as for Joe, he didn't feel as if the eight or nine years' difference in their ages was of any consequence whatever, now that under Dick's instructions, he had learned to swim and ride and play baseball almost as well as young Fairfax himself. He always appropriated as much of his companionship as he could, and "wondered what he wanted to fool away his time, bothering with girls for."

"Aha!" shrewd little Jem would retort in reply to him; "That's only because the girls are your own sisters; you wait awhile till we see you "fooling" round other boys' sisters! And anyhow, you can have lots of other boys for company; Dick belongs to us; and you always will belong to us, won't you, Dick, no matter if you are grown up a big man, and a



‘very fascinating young gentleman,’ as I heard Miss—well, a very pretty young lady—call you the other day to Jocelyn.”

“O Jem! you little fibber!—and what did Jocelyn say, please?”

“Oh, never mind. And you needn’t color up so, just like a girl. Here, sharpen this pencil for me, please, won’t you, Dick, Joe says he won’t show me any more, I’m so stupid. But indeed, I can’t help cutting the points off fast as I make ’em.”

“And if ever Jem gets done with you, Dick,” Janet would put in, “there’s that piece of poetry you promised to copy off for me;” and Juliet, with a look of enforced resignation would intimate that when he was quite at leisure, she had something to ask Dick about which only he could properly understand. And then Jocelyn would come in smiling, and sit down to the piano, and they would all gather round and sing; or there would be a game of Authors, or a general guessing of riddles and rebusses in the weekly paper, or the mother would bring in a tray full of black walnuts and pippins; and so the happy evenings would go by, and the boy grew from childhood to manhood with the feeling always of “belonging” in the Jay-birds’ Nest.

They missed him sadly when he went away



for two years to Philadelphia to complete the medical course which he had begun with his uncle, a long-time practitioner in the old borough of Oakleigh. But the free and friendly intercourse had been faithfully kept up by the interchange of letters and small birthday and holiday remembrances. Boxes of "Parkinson's candy," new magazines, a book now and then, or the latest fad in knick-knackerie, found their way through the mails to the brown house at the head of the street; and Dick's "den" at the medical college was the envy of all the other students for the daintiness of its appointments in the way of bureau-scarfs, slumber-rolls, photograph-cases, and all the varied items of feminine handicraft.

Now that he was back again at Oakleigh, a full-fledged M. D., he was established in his uncle's office as his clerk and assistant, and the old familiar companionship had been renewed, and there were few days when "Young Dr. Fairfax" and the Jay-family did not have a glimpse of each other.

No individual member had hitherto laid special claim to him; his cheery laugh, his ready interest, his gallant service, were the mutual property of each and all of them; and even a fortnight ago Jocelyn would never have thought of staying apart from the others when



she heard the sound of his familiar voice ; that curious thrilling consciousness keeping her bound to her chair—and waiting till he himself should come to seek her out.

But within that period, the very day, when her mother's brief and fatal illness had first attacked her, one or two little things had happened to awaken the consciousness, which had hitherto lain dormant in the young girl's heart. Some errand had taken her down town that morning, and passing the doctor's office, she had seen young Fairfax, after giving her a quick smile of greeting from the window, turn as though to take his hat, and then hastily leave the office. She had taken it for granted he was going to join her.

“Poor Dick! he hasn't much to do yet,” she had thought, and relaxed her pace for a moment; then glancing back, as no quick stride overtook her, she had been a little surprised to see the young doctor's tall figure hurrying off in just the opposite direction.

“Why, maybe he *has* had a call—a sudden one—” she thought again. “Wouldn't it be nice if he could establish a practice for himself right away! Of course, I suppose he'll have his uncle's by and by; but I know Dick well enough to know how he would like to **make** his own way independently for himself.



What a fine manly fellow he has grown up to be, our Dick! I was a little anxious—or mother was—about him in that student-life in a big, strange city; but I don't believe it has hurt him one bit; I do believe he is as good as he is handsome, and that's saying a good deal. Though not more than he—than he said—to me—the other day—” The girl scarcely whispered the words to her own self, and any one passing just then and getting a glimpse of the shy young face under its wide-brimmed hat, would have thought “what a color that oldest Jay girl has to-day!”

When her errands were finished, as Jocelyn, arrived at home again, was about entering as was the family habit, by the colonnade door, she caught a glimpse of the same tall figure crossing the front porch, and clearing the yard with great strides, putting his hand to the low gate and leaping over it into the street after his old boyish fashion. She stood watching him for a moment with a little chagrin: “So it was here he was coming! Well, as he stayed so long he might have stayed a little longer till I came back!—But what nonsense,—he'll be here again this evening, I don't doubt; and if he isn't, why—” and a shrug of her shoulders and a saucy smile completed the sentence.

He was there again indeed, that evening, ac-



companying his uncle, who had been hastily summoned by the mother's sudden alarming illness, to see if he could be of any service, and to do what he might toward calming and comforting the frightened family. All through that sorrowful time, he had been there at all hours, ready to come and to go, to serve and to wait, to suffer for and with them; but now that all was over, he had kept away for a day or two, withdrawing himself and his own sorrowful heart, that the stricken family might be alone with their own speechless grief.

But they had missed him, and he read his welcome in the prompt answer to his greeting:

"How's everybody? Why very glad to see you again, Dick, old fellow;" and then there was the usual chorus of voices which his advent always started, question and answer, each one with something to tell, to hear, to ask about.

Jocelyn listened to the mingled hum of sounds with a curious far-away feeling, as one listens at times to the tide rolling slowly, murmuring into the shore and watches for it to break in silver foam-wreaths at one's feet. She heard Jem's eager exclamation, "Why, is that you, Dick?" as she came down from putting her little sister to bed; and presently, for careless Jem had left the sitting-room door open also, she caught her own name; Dick asking,



"and where is Jocelyn this evening? Is she up-stairs with the little one, Jem?"

"No indeed; I put Jessie to bed myself so Jocelyn could have a little rest, She's in the parlor, but I guess she's ready to come out by now; I'll go tell her you are here."

"Oh no, don't take that trouble, Jem; I'll go find her myself, thank you." Then a protesting chorus, said:

"Oh, oh! well, don't stay long then; make her come in here with you!" and then, a quick stride through the hall, a tall straight young figure entering the parlor door and closing it after him, and Dick himself stood before her in the bay-window.

Jocelyn made a movement to rise. "I—I'll make a light," she said.

But Dick playfully pressed her back into her seat.

"Since when have you had to make the lights when I was round to do it for you?" he asked. "But Jocelyn, we don't want any light, do we? Just look up there!" He pointed upward to where the evening star flashed like a gem on the dusky brow of night.

"Do you remember one of the first little hymns we learned together for Sunday-school——

" 'The evening star hath lighted  
Her crystal lamp on high' "——



and it is like a lamp, isn't it, to-night? so big and bright. How it makes your eyes sparkle as you look up at it! But no wonder they shine, there are tears in them, Jocelyn!"

Jocelyn hastily put up her handkerchief: "No," she said, "but—" her voice faltered.

"Yes, I know," and the young man's own eyes grew suddenly moist. "I believe I loved her as well as if she had been my own mother, God bless her!—and I think—I think she felt to me almost as to a son."

Jocelyn could not speak and Fairfax had to hesitate before he could find voice again. Then in a very grave, gentle tone, he said, "I had reason to feel very sure of this, Jocelyn, one morning not long ago, the very day she was taken ill. You remember being down town? I saw you pass, and as I wished very particularly to speak with her alone I came right up."

Yes, Jocelyn remembered; she remembered also the glance which she met from her mother when she went up to her room; such a strange, examining, proud, and yet troubled glance, as she had never received from those calm eyes before; and under which she felt herself involuntarily coloring and growing warm. The glance itself had been involuntary, and was hastily transformed into the wonted pleasant



smile; and Jocelyn could not bring herself to ask her mother what it meant. Indeed, there was no need; for her own subtle consciousness swiftly supplied the key; "They have been talking about me!" she had cried to herself; and then there had come the summons to luncheon, afternoon callers, the children flocking home from school, and later, the sudden and fatal illness which had put all thoughts except those awful ones of death and loss and grief unspeakable, out of all hearts and minds.

She recalled it all now, but she could not say anything, and Fairfax went on, speaking in a low serious tone.

"It was not that I had anything new to tell her; she understood well enough all along what sort of feeling I had for you, what hope I was cherishing--and you knew it too, didn't you, Jocelyn? Just give me one look won't you, dear?"

A pause, a slow, reluctant movement, a single mute uplifting of the long-lashed lids, and then the eyes were veiled again. It seemed to her now as though she had always known it, though she had never spoken even with her own heart about it.

"Yes, well, I knew it—God bless you, dear!—and was very happy in the knowing, and con-



tent to bide my time. But something had happened a day or two before which made me want to have it more settled; signed and sealed, as one may say. I had received a letter from an old student-chum of mine who had passed on to me an offer which had been made to him, but which he couldn't accept, because his father, an old physician, wished to retire from business and put his practice directly into his son's hands. It was an odd sort of offer, something out of the usual way, and a rather tempting one in some respects; in all respects perhaps, except the one great one, that it would mean my leaving Oakleigh—and you—again for a good while."

Jocelyn made a little wistful movement, and the white hands locked loosely in her lap began nervously to lace and interlace each other.

"You don't like the notion, dear?" asked Fairfax quickly. "You don't want me to go away? Well, that settles the matter at once then. That was why I brought myself to speak of my own feelings when I knew how, how full your heart was of other things. But I don't need to trouble you any farther now, dear. If you do not wish me to leave you, I certainly shall not, and we needn't talk any more about it now."



He made a movement as if to rise from the low seat which ran around the half circle of the window, upon which he had placed himself, almost at her feet. But Jocelyn put out her hand a moment to detain him.

"Tell me about it," she said without lifting her eyes, and speaking with an effort.

"Why certainly," settling his tall length back again upon the cushions; "since you are interested to hear; and then we need not even think of it again. Well, it seems there is a wealthy old lady living in Philadelphia, an Englishwoman, and a crank, I reckon, on most subjects, especially upon that of her health, and the pernicious effect this 'atrocious American climate' has upon the same! She is here on account of her daughter having married a prominent Philadelphia lawyer, whom she met abroad, and the old lady finds it hard to live without her. She finds it harder still however, to live in America, where they 'don't speak English,' you know; call 'lifts' elevators, and 'trams' horsecars; and otherwise offend her ladyship's eyes and ears every hour of the day. So my friend writes me she has developed a first-class case of hypochondria, and has made up her mind to quit these benighted shores, and wing her flight to the gentler climes of Italy, France, Greece, and the Mediterranean gener-



ally. But as she speaks no language but her own, and has no longer her daughter for interpreter and companion; and does not choose to be quite dependent upon her courier and her maid; or entirely at the mercy of those 'monkeyfied foreign quacks'—I use quotations, please!—she has decided to take her own physician along with her, traveling quite as a princess, in private carriages, and trying, I fancy, to kill time and cure herself in the least disagreeable way she can think of.

“Now, as I told you, my friend thought it wise for business reasons, to decline the proposal made to him to become physician-in-ordinary to the Hon. Mrs. Chumley. The idea of a long luxurious tour through the south of Europe was very attractive, he admits; but the fact of an established practice was more so. And so, as he knew my uncle was good for any number of years yet, and did not really need me here, he very kindly recommended me in his stead. The Hon. Mrs. Chumley who evidently had great faith in him, and who, of course, can only expect to find a young unsettled doctor at her disposal for such a service as that, was graciously pleased to accept me as a substitute—and that is really all there is about it, Jocelyn. And we need not think of it again, dear.”



But Jocelyn would not waive the subject so lightly away.

“What does your uncle say to it?” she said, trying to keep her voice steady and neutral.

“Oh well, he sees certain advantages in it, of course. He has no real use for me at present, and he knows there is no immediate necessity for me to try to establish a practice, as I have the little property my father left me, and shall drop into his business when he steps out of it. That seems to go without saying, you know; I believe there has always been a Dr. Fairfax in Oakleigh since there was any Oakleigh or any Fairfaxes this side the big pond. And there are good old folks here, bless 'em! who wouldn't think they could take a pill or a draught prescribed by anybody of a different name!

“So my uncle thinks it would be a good opportunity to widen my horizon, you know; to see other countries, hear other people's talk, see how the other half of the world lives and thinks and feels. I should have plenty of time to study languages on the spot where they are spoken, and to go through the hospitals in Paris and Vienna; and he thinks that would help me to keep abreast of modern advancement in my profession, and in short, that it would make of me something more than a mere



country doctor who had never been three hundred miles away from his native Virginia.

"But Uncle Steve understands, Jocelyn; he knows how things are—for I have told him," confessed the young fellow, reddening visibly in the starlight. "He knows all that is as nothing to me in comparison with the thought of being of use or comfort to you, and he has not urged it, no, nor even advised; he has left it entirely to me, and I leave it entirely to you. If you will say you want me to stay, Jocelyn—" he tried again to get possession of her hands; "if you will only tell me what I hope and believe, but can't feel sure of till you do—if you will let me speak to your father—your mother was going to, but now I must——"

But Jocelyn drew away, and made a quick gesture of denial.

"No, no! you must not do that," she cried. Poor girl, she had been having a sharp struggle with herself all this while. She had listened with a keenly sensitive outward ear which missed not one of all the long list of advantages that would naturally accrue from such a tour of travel and observation; but all the while her own inner feelings were uttering their pained protest; her self-love was tingling at the thought of his even considering the possibility of leaving her, for so far, and so long, just now;



and her young heart, already burdened with grief, was quivering with the sense of added loss and loneliness to come. But the mention of her father acted at once as a power to draw her up out of the quicksands of selfishness, and set her feet upon firm ground again.

She braced herself with a sort of sad firmness: "No, no, Dick, you must not do that," she repeated gravely and gently. "My poor father—he has all he is able to bear just now; or at least, neither you nor I would wish to add a feather's weight to his burden. And it would pain him, I know, surprise and wound him, even to imagine that I, that we, could be giving a thought to any foolish happiness of our own when his heart was feeling so sore and empty——"

"But surely, Jocelyn, he loves you well enough—he would be glad to know that some happiness had come to you in the midst of your trouble—O Jocelyn!" and the young man's face glowed—"do you know, my dear, what an admission you have made? How happy you have made me!"

Jocelyn's pale face flushed in the cool silver of the starlight. She faltered a moment, but then, "Never mind that now, Dick," she said firmly. "I am thinking of my father, and I think, no matter how much he loves me he



would have a right to feel hurt at your bringing any such matter to him just at this time. Of course I understand how you had to come to me because you wanted me to help you decide about this matter of going away. Well, it is decided as far as I am concerned, Dick. In any case, I think, I hope, I should have urged you to go, for your own advantage; but now that you have been so rash, foolish boy! I feel that you really must go. You could not keep on coming here just in the old way, you know you couldn't—" and the sweet shy color stole into her cheek again. "You'd be sure to betray yourself in some way, to let them suspect something, and Dick, I cannot consent to that. I simply *cannot* let them imagine I am thinking of myself more than of them at such a time. I don't want to think of myself. I feel that God has put me in my mother's place to them, and by his help I mean to fill it so far as in me lies. And I could not do this if you were constantly coming claiming me, wanting to keep me to yourself evenings, like this, don't you see? Poor things, I'm afraid they are feeling left out and hurt even now."

The young man did not answer. He sat looking straight before him, gloomy and pained himself.

"You do see, or you will presently, when you



have thought it over," Jocelyn urged with soft insistence. "There is no selfishness in your nature—at least I never have found it out. And it isn't as though you did not have a pleasant alternative, as though you were obliged to stay here and yet be kept on guard and at a distance. You shall start straight away on your tour of improvement, and I don't doubt the Hon. Mrs. Chumley will strengthen your virtues of patience, self-control, good-humor; I expect I shall feel very grateful to her one of these days."

"Oh, you do, do you!" and the young physician-in-ordinary started up, all alert and beaming again. "And when, may I be permitted to ask, is that vague period 'one of these days' to be looked forward to? For how long do you contemplate banishing me in this cool fashion? My old lady may live to the age of Methuselah for aught I know, and become so devoted to me that she will not be willing to part from my valuable self. But what I want to know is the limit *you* propose? Set some more definite bounds, please, to my patience and forbearance, and your self-abnegation in favor of others!"

"Hear, hear!" mocked Jocelyn, with an effort at playfulness which poorly disguised the cost of the sacrifice she was making. "Why,



sometime in the course of three or four years, I suppose—”

Dick gave a low incredulous whistle. “Yes, I reckon so. Eight or ten, why don’t you say, ‘J. J.’?”

“When Juliet has left school, and is ready.”

“I think I hear my name spoken,” suddenly said a chill, offended voice at the parlor door. “I would rather, if it is just the same to you two, you would talk with me than about me. What are you staying off here by yourselves, in the dark for? The children have got tired waiting and gone off to bed.”

“In the dark!” repeated Dick, jumping up to his feet, and pulling aside the heavy curtain which separated the bay-window from the rest of the room.

“Look there! Why, we’ve had a special lamp for our benefit. Isn’t it glorious?”

He flashed a quick glance at Jocelyn as he spoke, as though he should say, “Yes, and a star has risen in our hearts in the midst of the darkness, which shall never set, but brighten our lives unto the end!”

But she would not meet his look, and Juliet only raised her eyes indifferently to the brilliant planet for a moment.

“Yes, it is very bright this evening,” she said in a neutral tone. “But a lamp is much more



comfortable. Why not come into the sitting-room? There is something I wanted to talk to you about, Dick."

"Suppose you sit down here, a moment, dear," said Jocelyn gently, making place for her. "Dick has something to tell you too, Juliet. He is going away again."



## CHAPTER V.

### A MYSTERY.

THERE was a general outburst of protest and lamentation among the younger members of the Jay family when the announcement of their special friend's purposed departure was publicly made next morning. Joe especially was in a fine rage, and fairly snapped and growled.

"Like to know what a man that could stay in America wanted to go wandering off amongst those frog and macaroni-eating fellows for? Virginia, and oysters, and terrapin, were good enough for him."

"I'm afraid your horizon is limited, Joe, my boy," said his father, looking almost amused, in spite of his own regret at the loss of his favorite Dick.

"Those same frog-eaters would shrink with horror at the sight of one of our diamond-backs poking out his leathery head and claws; and we have learned to appreciate their special dainty more readily, I fancy, than they have ours. Then even as to oysters, people on the



other side think our Chesapeake-bay bivalves quite too large to be delicate ; even Thackeray said when he first ate one that he felt as if he had swallowed a baby ! You see it widens one's understanding of relative values to get out of one's own corner into other people's, once in a while."

Joe was so overwhelmed at having surprised his sad and silent father into something really like playfulness again, that he would not risk trying to maintain his position, but he leavened his grief none the less with disgust and wrath. Janet took hers mournfully, with moistening eyes : "I don't know what in the world we shall do without him !" she said in her most plaintive tone. "There won't be anybody at all now to brighten us up a little." But Juliet, hiding her own pain in her own breast after her usual Spartan fashion, swooped down upon her severely.

"For pity's sake," she exclaimed, "do Janet, learn to depend upon yourself, and not always be wanting to lean upon others. Brighten yourself up !"

Jem took the news in her wonted chirping cricket-like way : "Oh well, it's too bad, but he'll be coming back before a hundred years," she said. "And don't cry, Janet ; you're making poor little Jess pucker up her mouth. He'll



bring us all something pretty, I'm sure he will; and just think what fun it'll be to show the girls a present that was really brought for our own selves straight from Europe!" Jocelyn gave the cheery little cricket a quick grateful glance; it was getting to be almost too much for her to hear!

It seemed at first almost like that other sorrowful coming back to an empty house when they returned from seeing him off at the little railway station; but the others had their lessons and their school-mates to push him gradually out of their minds, and as for Jocelyn, the sweet was so mingled with the bitter that she felt she had no right to complain. After one sharp struggle with the haunting sense of additional loss, she was able to balance it with her gain, and shaking off from her own spirit the cloud that would have spread itself over the rest of the household, she came back into her old sweet cheerful composure, and went about her household ways, sustained by the consciousness of doing what was right, and cheered by

"The secret of a happy thought  
She did not care to speak."

Meanwhile letters presently came from the wanderer, family letters, full of all manner of merry nonsense, of clever characterization and



piquant observation. Nothing escaped Dick's quick eyes and ears, and he so reported and photographed things that they all felt as though they were making the tour of the Riviera with him. He did not confine himself to the affairs of his journey either; there were always plentiful manifestations of interest in all that was going on in the little Virginia town, and especially in the big brown cottage: Dick forgot no one and nothing, and every member of the Jay family had the satisfaction of feeling when one of those thin blue envelopes, pasted all over with queer-looking stamps arrived, that it was meant just as much for that individual one as for any of the others. If Jocelyn sometimes fancied, reading the closely-written pages over again all to herself in her own room when the rest were away at school, that she could discover something—a hint, an allusion, special to herself, between the lines, what harm in it? But Dick was very faithful to his promise of caution; no cause was given for hurt feelings; and indeed they could afford to do without separate communication; for in Dick's breast pocket, wherever he went, went with him as his beloved companion the little Testament in which she had marked a dozen verses reminding him of her constant "heart's desire and prayer to God" for his welfare, body and soul: while



in a tiny bag, suspended from a slender gold chain which she had worn since she was a baby, hung next to Jocelyn's innocent heart an old-fashioned ring—it had been his mother's betrothal ring—whose quaint inscription, "*mizpah*" comforted her daily and nightly with the thought that the Lord watched between him and her.

So the days wore into weeks and the weeks into months in the Jay Bird's Nest, and nothing occurred to warrant especial chronicling. The household life had been so well-ordered by the wise and tender hand that had now vanished, that it was not difficult to settle back after its brief painful disruption, into the old methodical ways. The cook, notwithstanding all that might be wished to the contrary, is always more or less the arbiter of comfort and discomfort in a household; and Aunt Peggy had made up her mind to create no change in the order of things. She had discovered that the new young mistress had no intention of interfering with her right and privileges, while yet quietly competent to maintain her own; she perceived that there was no diminution of the kindly interest and consideration which had always made her feel less like a servant than a "*reglah membah o' de fambly*;" and she was relieved to find that there were to be no unlawful raids



made on her premises by young folks suddenly released from constraint.

"'Clah to grashus," she announced in a burst of confidence one morning to her fellow-servant; "nevah did see a dahtah in all my bawn days mo' like her maw dan Miss Jocelyn is. I was feaht dey was gwine to be all kine o' 'ructions in dis heah kitchen; but I was clean done mistakened fo' onct. She ac's like jes what she is, a raal ole-time fust, fambly tide-watah Fahgin-yah lady; an' dat's de kine I knows jes' haow to git along wid."

"I never 'spected nothin' else myself," was Mahaly's response. "I always knew I could get along all right with Miss Jocelyn. It's she's got the hardest time, poor young lady. She has her paw on her mind all the time, and them child'en. They try her right smart sometimes, 'deed they do. It's a deal o' responsibility, but then, she's done got religion long ago, you know, and they say that does help some folks."

"You talks like a heathen idol, Mahaly Byrd," rejoined Aunt Peggy in a tone of severe reprobation.

"They says—'why don't ye go 'long up to the mo'nah's bench an' fine out fo' yo's'ef de powah o' religion? I'm sho' ye needs it ev'ry hour.'"

Mahaly smiled a meaning smile. "Well you see, Aunt Peggy," she said, "there's religion an'



religion. Ef I was sure I could git the kind Miss Jocelyn's got, that makes her so sweet and pleasant, and always thinkin' of everybody else before herself, and tryin' to spread the sunshine all around her, why I believe I would try an' git my courage up. But when I see some other folks' religion, seems to me I'm most as well off bein' a heathen idol, or whatever it was you called me!"

Having laid which illogical salve to her conscience, and stuck what she considered a needed pin into the bladder of the old woman's self-conceit, Mahaly took her tray of dishes upon her head and sailed out of the kitchen to put them away in their cupboard, before Aunt Peggy could get breath enough to retort.

It was true enough however, what she said about "the child'en trying" her young lady. She had wielded her sceptre so prudently, had "done her spiriting so gently," that thus far there had been no positive outbreaks against her mild authority, no absolute rebellion in the nest. But her patience was exercised day by day with protests and petitions about this or that which they would have accepted as a matter of course with their mother; with cavillings and objections which a smiling or an expostulating glance from her would have silenced at once; but which Jocelyn, not possessing the



magic charm which belongs essentially to loving motherhood, was obliged to take into consideration, to argue with, and finally to enforce upon reluctant acquiescence. Little things, it is true, but Joe only jerked up his head and muttered "chestnuts," when she suggested that it was as possible for a boy as for a girl to be neat and orderly. That young gentleman, duly trained to fold up his napkin after meals and place it in his ring, began to find it easier now to let it fall crumpled upon the floor; also to rush down to breakfast, tying his cravat as he went, and never choosing to open either bed or window. The little girls too began to grumble at this regulation:

"It takes so much time," protested Jem, "to take all the bed-clothes apart every morning. I don't see what they want with so much airing;" and Janet complained:

"Yes, it gives me the shivers when I get into bed at night—the sheets are so cold!"

But Jocelyn knew this was only an excuse for indolence, and good-humoredly insisted on her mother's rules being kept in practice.

When Joe growled, "'Tain't boys' business anyhow, it's girls' nonsense, to be fussing with table and bed linen," she would answer playfully, "Why boys want to be gentlemen, Joe, just as much as girls do to be ladies, and neat-



ness and cleanliness are just as much a necessity with one as with the other. Do as I want you, dear, that's a good fellow; and one of these days a certain dear little Somebody will say 'I declare, Joe, you certainly were well-brought up at home! You've got such nice orderly ways!'"

And Joe would redden in spite of himself, and say "Oh go 'long!" and go himself to do what was desired; or if he happened to be in a contrary mood, there would be sulks and slamming of doors.

The mother had been perhaps over indulgent in the gratification of their various fancies as to their food and drink: "It isn't so very much trouble," she would say, "to remember what one likes and what another doesn't; and I do love to see people pleased and cheerful around my table!" But if it sometimes chanced, as will happen in the best regulated families, that a dinner or breakfast might be less popular than another, the disinclination to "make mother feel bad" availed to prevent any decided show of disapprobation.

But with poor Jocelyn it was different. She was promptly made to feel her shortcomings if each individual taste was not separately consulted; and she sometimes found herself rebell-



ing against the imposition upon her memory and her ingenuity.

"I wonder what you would do, young people," she expostulated one morning, when nobody seemed to be exactly suited, "if you were brought up as Nathalie Rothberg's father was. You know her mother was a cousin of our mother's, and she married him in Washington where he was an attaché to the Austrian legation, and went abroad with him when he returned to Vienna. Well Nathalie told me a good deal about the foreign way of doing things, when I met her at her mother's house in Petersburg last summer. And about this one matter of the table, she told me that when her father was a boy at home, if ever there was anything which he didn't like and declined to take, her grandfather required him to make his entire meal of that one dish, or go without anything until he was hungry enough to eat it. And it would be brought on again and again, until he had got over what they called his silly objection to good food, and learned to eat anything that was set before him. Now what in this world would you all do, if any such rule was established in this house?"

"Do? fight it every time and all the time!" asserted Joe, in his most pugnacious manner. "Nobody would ever force me to eat what I



didn't like, and if I starved to death the law would see to that!"

"Oh what nonsense!" laughed Jocelyn. "You'd find the thought of the law avenging you, wouldn't make the process of starving any more agreeable. I guess you'd compromise with the plum-and-fish soup, which I believe was the special article of Baron Rothberg's aversion."

"Plum-and-fish soup!" Who ever heard of such a mess? I don't believe I ever could have swallowed it!" protested Jem. Janet said appealingly, "And I don't believe our father would ever have been so unkind as to make us!"

"Why discuss the subject? There is no question about it," interposed Juliet in a cold decided tone, but her father, roused from his paper by the animated voices, put in his rare word.

"Well, I don't know," he said, answering Janet's loyal little assertion of trust in him, "but that it might be the truest kindness to establish some such rule as that. I'm afraid you are all getting too notional in your tastes. The gratification of one's palate isn't of half as much consequence as good feeling and cheerfulness about a table; and we ought to show all possible consideration for a young house-keeper who is doing her best, as your sister is.



Don't let us have any more of this sort of thing, please." And so it ended for that time.

As time passed on things had settled themselves down into orderly routine again; Jocelyn got on comfortably enough through the mornings. Only little Jessie was at home then, and trotted about the house with her sister, hindering, it is true, rather than helping, in her various duties, but gradually growing to look upon her as in her mother's place, and being on the whole obedient and loving. But she had learned to shrink a little from the onslaught of the others into her peaceful room, when, tired of the restraints of school, they came rushing up, prepared to enjoy freedom to the utmost. A host of wishes and demands were instantly let loose upon her: "Jocelyn, can't I have a piece of cake and an orange?"

"But Joe, the oranges are for dessert."

"Well, why don't you get more of them then?"

"But Joe, papa says the housekeeping must be kept within such and such a limit."

"O pshaw! I know mother always used to have an orange for a fellow when he wanted it!"

"Because she put her own by for you half the time, then," Jem would interpose. "Jocelyn, won't you just mend this tear in my skirt; I



caught it on a nail, and I can't darn fit to be seen?"

"Yes, rushing along like a tomboy," Joe would seize the chance of retorting.

"Jocelyn!" Janet would come in, as soon as she could find an opportunity, "Need I practice this afternoon? I've got something else to do I like a great deal better than that old music anyhow!" And Juliet would rejoin incisively, "For your own sake, Janet, if you are so dull as not to appreciate music, don't publish the fact; keep it to yourself."

"Oh but you don't know, you don't any of you know," put in Jem, on one such occasion as this, looking very wise and mischievous; "what it is that Janet likes doing so much better than practicing *I* could tell you, for I have guessed—

But Janet turned upon her suddenly, reddening furiously, and with unwonted spirit flashing in her great soft eyes: "You don't know, any such thing," she cried passionately, almost in tears. "You haven't any right even to try to guess; it is none of your affair; it is only my business. And if you have been trying to find out, it was prying; I wouldn't be a Paul Pry, Jem!"

"Oh gently, gently! Don't call names, Janet," interposed Jocelyn; "and Jem, you



mustn't try to intrude upon another's private matters, and if you discover them accidentally, you must never betray them. Go now, and do your practicing, that's a good girl, Janet; you wouldn't want to hurt Miss Kerr's feelings by letting her see you wouldn't take the trouble to prepare your lesson for her. And you, Jem, go put on another dress and bring that one to me if you want me to mend it for you."

But as she sat deftly bringing together the edges of the great jagged rent, and at the same time arbitrating various points of discussion in a game of "tit-tat-to" between Jem and Jessie, she was pondering in her heart whether it would not be better for Janet to give up her music than to go on unwillingly with a study in which she took no interest; and conjecturing what could be the secret pursuit for which she felt such fondness, and with regard to which she had shown such sensitive shyness.

She did not like mysteries and secrets in a family; she wondered if it was quite best to allow them; if she ought not to attempt to gain Janet's confidence on what seemed to be a matter of such deep feeling. But she felt that after all, she could not possibly mistrust the gentle girl, whose chief fault was a certain pensive indolence and self-absorption, which threatened, if unchecked, to become selfishness, one



of these days; and moreover, she was too delicate-minded not to shrink from unwelcome intrusion upon even a child's sensitive personality.

Jem however, was not troubled with any such fine scruples; her "bump" of curiosity was very largely developed, and she had won the unflattering soubriquet of Paul Pry more than once by her unwarrantable interest in other people's affairs. Not all her mother's expostulations and warnings had availed as yet to eradicate her keen scent for anything like a mystery; her intense desire to know what everybody around her was doing, to hear what they were saying; and Janet's secret absorption in some unexplained occupation had for some time been the source of much tantalizing concern to her.

She had made excuses to follow her up-stairs, when she had heard Janet slip softly up to her room after the regulation number of scales and exercises had been reluctantly rehearsed; had claimed the right of equal proprietorship to insist upon having the door opened; and had listened eagerly to certain rustling sounds, as of papers hurriedly thrust away, while waiting outside for the key to turn in the lock.

"I should like to know what in the world you want to shut yourself in here in this sort of way for?" she would say, looking curiously



around in a fever of desire to discover the mystery ; but there was never any visible sign of unusual occupation going on. Janet's book would be lying turned down open, on her chair, and Janet herself would betray nothing more than ordinary annoyance at interruption :

"Of course you 'would like to know' Jem ; you always do. But what is there so strange in my wanting to have a little quiet time to myself after all the bustle in school all day ? And what is the objection to my having it in my own room ? "

"But it is my room too," Jem would rejoin, "and you have no right to lock the door against me ! "

"I always open it when you want to come in."

"Yes, but you wait till you do *something*, I don't know what ! And I just think it's real mean of you, Janet, to have secrets from your own sister ! " poor Jem would urge, almost with tears. But Janet would only look passive, and wait in resigned patience till little Miss Inquisitive would rush away baffled and offended, only to try the experiment again at some future season.

One day she had chosen to feel herself especially aggrieved ; it was Saturday morning ; the little weekly allowance of spending money which had been one of their mother's wise pro-



visions, was jingling in their little purses, and Jem was coaxing Janet to go down town with her to make sundry small but important purchases.

"I wish you would go with Jocelyn and Jessie, Jem," her sister answered reluctantly: "I'm not ready just yet."

"Well, I'll wait for you. You are going, sometime this morning, aren't you?"

"Yes—but—you run on now with them, Jem, why don't you?"

Jem's open little countenance took on a mortified expression.

"Because I'd rather go with you, Janet!" she blurted out, almost ready to cry. "I don't know what's come over you lately; we always used to do everything and go everywhere together, and mother wanted us to, too. But now you act so strange; you keep away from me, and I don't believe you love me one single bit anymore!"

Janet looked annoyed: "Oh yes, Jem, I do love you just as much as ever," she said; "but you bother me; you want to know everything."

"Well, why shouldn't I? What do you want to have secrets for? You're just going off all by yourself to buy something you're not



going to tell about,—and I think it's real mean, and selfish, and unkind ! ”

“ It's easy to call names, but it's not very nice,” rejoined Janet coldly, turning away and beginning to ascend the stairs ; while poor little Jem, puzzled and discomfited, was fain to run on and overtake her other sisters, and pour out her chagrin into Jocelyn's kind ear.

As they were returning from their various errands an hour or two later, they met Miss Kerr the girls' music-teacher, at their own gate.

“ Do you think your sisters would mind taking their lessons this morning instead of at the usual hour, Miss Jerome ? ” she asked. “ I have an invitation for this afternoon I'd like to accept.”

“ Why no,” said Jocelyn ; “ come right in. I think they'll be glad to accommodate you. Run up, Jem, please, and see which can come first, Juliet or Janet.”

Juliet was busy with something which she did not wish to lay aside till it was finished, and Jem went on to her own room. As usual nowadays she found the door locked, and she rattled the knob with considerable asperity.

“ Open the door right away, Janet,” she called ; “ and come down and take your music-



lesson. Miss Kerr is going out this afternoon, and she wants to give it to you now."

"Oh dear!" came a desperate sigh from within. "Just as I was——,"

The sentence broke off tantalizingly in the middle, and was followed by the same rustling of paper which had so often puzzled Jem's inquisitive ears. A moment after the door opened and Janet appeared with a disconsolate face.

"Don't feel very obliging to-day, do you?" said Jem, giving her a keen glance. "Don't seem to me such a dreadful hardship to accommodate your teacher for once. She hasn't any too many pleasures in her life, I guess."

Janet passed on without making any reply, and Jemima added to herself, "And it beats me to know what on earth you're up to, that you hate so to be interrupted!"

She sent a sharper glance than usual round the simple little bed chamber. There was nothing noticeable to be observed. The two drawers in the bureau which belonged to Janet were only partly closed, after her wonted indolent fashion; her portfolio, work-box, dressing-case, all her little possessions, birthday and Christmas tokens, were in full sight, and there was no clue apparent to the mystery which Jem was so eager to solve. Except—yes, that



was rather a queer-looking parcel, so long and flat, done up in brown paper, which lay on the top of a little trunk in the corner beside the bureau.

"That is what she went out to buy all by herself this morning!" exclaimed Jem to herself, pouncing eagerly upon it. "What in the world can it be? It feels thick and smooth, like paper. The string is untied—I don't see why I shouldn't take a peep: it's all nonsense, Janet's beginning to have secrets from me!"

And curiosity getting the better of conscience in the matter, "Miss Inquisitive" turned back a corner of the brown wrapping, and discovered simply a quire of cheap foolscap writing paper.

"Well! what on earth can she want with that?" speculated Jemima, her curiosity no whit appeased.

"It was always the rustling of paper I heard,—yes, and there's a pile of pencil-sharpenings on the floor—just like her to leave all those chips there! She must have been writing a lot, but what? She does her French exercises at school, in a blank-book; and all these great big sheets—mercy! The idea of spending her money for them! What can it mean?"

A thought struck her as she slowly re-



folded the brown wrapping-paper, and prepared to replace it where she had found it.

“Why did she leave it here on this trunk, instead of on the table? I think I’ll take a peep in this same little trunk. I haven’t been in it for a long time.”

Now the trunk was a little old-fashioned, hair-covered receptacle, which had belonged to their father when he was a young man, and which for years had been made over to the little girls as a place of deposit for all their odds and ends, broken dolls, discarded playthings, tattered picture-books, etc., etc. They had both sometime ago “put away childish things” of that sort, and the little old trunk had stood there in its out-of-the-way corner, unopened for months, so far as Jemima was aware. Some unaccountable impulse made her lift the lid now, when to her surprise, instead of a disorderly huddle of indiscriminate objects as of old, the various contents were disposed as compactly as their nature permitted in the lower part of the trunk; a large newspaper was laid smoothly over them, and within the folds of another, promptly opened by Jem’s lawless little fingers, lay several more sheets of the same foolscap paper. These however were quite covered with pencilled writing in which



Jem at once recognized Janet's unformed childish scrawl.

"Well! if I ever!" was Paul Pry's exclamation, as she eagerly held up the topmost sheet and began to decipher the heading. "So that's the wonderful secret, is it, Janet—our Janet,—turned authoress! That's what's come of her for ever poking over story-books,—she's gone trying to write 'em herself. If I ever, ever did! Janet! Why she is but eleven years old! The very idea! What does *she* know about writing stories? But it *looks* like one, I declare; here's the name and all, just the way it is in a book, only not printed: let me see—

### "THE MAGIC RIVERS."

H'm! Sounds like some o' those fairy tales, or allegories, or things, in the Readers at school. I just wonder if she isn't only copying them to help her handwriting, maybe. Need's it, I'm sure; I believe it's worse than mine. Well—let's see!"

And she settled herself deliberately on the floor beside the little trunk which poor Janet had fondly supposed was an ark of safety, and secure in the certainty of Janet's being safe for half an hour, began to decipher the story.

She was undisturbed for some time, for



Juliet was busy putting the frills in the neck and sleeves of her Sunday gown; Janet was deep in the intricacies of a minor scale; Joe was off on his Saturday rambles with his boy-mates; and Jessie was laying claim upon Jocelyn after a new fashion.

She had come trotting after her sister as she went into the colonnade to make up her week's marketing-book. There was an old-fashioned desk there, mounted upon a platform, which had been arranged for the use of a governess years ago, when Mrs. Jerome had thought the children too young to walk the distance to school in all weathers. The pretty young governess took it into her head to get married, when Jem was about five years old and possessed of a very sturdy little pair of legs, and an indefinite taste for activity and change. So it was decided that they should all go to school together, instead of studying at home, and the desk had been put where it would be least in the way, and yet convenient to the kitchen if the housekeeper wished to refresh her memory by Aunt Peggy's aid. Jocelyn kept her receipt-books there, and her account-books, and was busy adding up certain columns of figures relative to household expenses, when Jessie came trotting in with a look of importance on her bright little face.



“Dessie’s made up her mind she’s goin’ to say her lessons like the other chil’ren,” she stated gravely. “Aunt Peggy says Dessie’s a great big girl now, an’ she ought to be ashamed not to know how to read her book. So she’s made up her mind she’s goin’ to school, but not to any cross old teacher like Jem’s. You got to be Dessie’s teacher, Dottelyn.”

“It’s lazy scholars make cross teachers, I guess, Jessie,” answered her sister, still running her pencil down the column. “And besides, it’s Saturday, you know, and there isn’t any school Saturdays.”

“Well, never mind;—there’s lessons,” urged the little one, possessed to carry out her new fancy. “’Cause Janet’s takin’ a lesson now. And I want you to hear me say mine. I been studyin’ it *hard*; I can spell ‘ba-by—’ doll-baby! Now, there!”

Jocelyn laughed. She had verified her addition, it was correct, and now she was willing to humor the winsome little creature who had come to seem as much child as sister to her.

“Here’s my book—you must take it,” said Jessie; “and I must stand here in front of you, and I must put my hands behind me, the way the little chil’en does at school,—and you mustn’t laugh now, Dottelyn! This ain’t play,



—this is real-'nuff school! now—give me out a word to spell—”

But just then, a rush of footsteps was heard racing down the stairs; an eager voice called “Jocelyn! O, Jocelyn! where are you?” and Jem came bursting into the improvised school-room, waving a sheaf of papers over her head, and crying out half in mockery, half in triumph,

“O Jocelyn! what do you think? Would you believe it, we have an *authoress* in the family? And who do you think it is? Janet! I’ve found out her wonderful secret!”



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE MYSTERY UNRAVELLED.

**B**UT before Jocelyn, surprised and puzzled, could ask what was the meaning of all this, the little apartment was raided again. Jem had not noticed in her excitement that the parlor door was just opening, as she flew down-stairs; but Janet, coming out from her lesson, had looked after her in amazement as she whirled through the hall toward the colonnade, and had heard the loud and reckless betrayal of her secret—the rude publication of a precious and sacred thing which the shy and sensitive child had kept hidden in her breast as the arbutus hides its faint sweet blooms under the forest leaves, and had never revealed it except in timid blushing confidence to her dear dead mother.

She had been so happy in her work; such strange bright thoughts kept weaving themselves, day and night, in and out of her brain; it had been such pleasant labor to try to write them out on paper; and the loving interest and approbation which her mother had given to



these childish efforts had been so sweet! She had begged her not to speak of it.

"I couldn't bear to have them all exclaiming and asking questions, and teasing, mother," she had pleaded. "It's a different thing with *you*—but there isn't any need, is there for the others to know? Just let it be your and my secret!"

And her mother, understanding the shy, sensitive nature, had yielded to her wish.

"I don't like secrets in a family, you know, dear," she had said. "They are apt to make ill feeling, one way or another; but this—well, we won't speak of it, until you are surer of yourself. I think I feel sure of the others now; I don't believe but that they would be proud and pleased, just as mother is, my little girl. And if they teased a little, why that means nothing, and young folks in a big family must learn to give and take."

"Ah well, I wouldn't like to be teased about this," Janet had urged, her face all in a shy glow, and her mother had respected her right to the privacy of her own innermost thoughts and feelings.

But now an impertinent little hand had invaded this sacred privacy; a reckless little tongue was proclaiming her precious secret to all her small world. For she saw Joe coming across the lawn toward the colonnade door in



search of lunch, doubtless, and little thinking what a titbit was in store for his fun-loving soul. And there was Juliet coming down the stairs for her lesson—she would go to see what all the fuss was about, and her cool, sarcastic way of taking it would be worse even than Joe's teasing,—oh, it was wicked, it was cruel, it was everything, of Jem !

Thought is swifter than lightning, and all this was as one burning flash to poor Janet's mind. In a white heat of anger and shame she flew along the hall after the author of her confusion, and appeared, meteor-like, in the midst of the group.

"Give me my papers, give them to me this instant !" she cried, her face pale with passion and with pain, and gripping Jem's arm as it whirled the manuscript over her head, in a grasp as of a vise. "Give them to me, I say, you mean, prying creature, you Paul Pry—you—you—"

But words failed to express her sense of outrage, to relieve her tempest of anger and pain ; being taller than her younger sister she quickly recovered her property from Jem's mischievous hand, only adding :

"I shall appeal to my father ; I shall see if I am not to be protected—"

She rushed like a whirlwind from the room



and sped up to the very top of the house, to the old unused garret, where amid dust and cobwebs she threw herself down and gave way to the passion of tears and sobs which alone could give relief to her overmastering emotion.

Meanwhile Jem, discomfited and disconcerted, stood stranded in the middle of the floor, looking round with rather a foolish smile upon the group which had gathered there at the sound of high words.

"For pity's sake! What a tempest she is when she gets roused!" she said. "How could I imagine she would make such a fuss just about my telling she wrote stories! I'm sure I wish I could! I would not be hiding them away in an old trunk, and locking the door, and never letting anybody know! I think it's awful smart of her—I should be proud—"

"Well you need something to be proud of just now, sure enough, Jem," said Joe, looking at her, his honest, freckled face full of contempt. "So you've been poking about into other people's affairs again, and then blabbing! You are a regular Paul Pry, and no mistake about it, now, ain't you? I can tell you, I for one, am not very proud of you, just now!" and, Master Joe, having delivered himself to this effect, marched off to the kitchen, to see what he could



coax out of Aunt Peggy in the way of a mid-day "snack."

"What a tempest in a tea-pot all this seems to be!" commented Juliet, who had come in too late to gather a full apprehension of the matter. "I think I shall go and take my music-lesson. But really, Jocelyn, why don't you make Jem let things alone—" She walked off without completing her sentence, and Jem remained standing, twisting her fingers together in discomfiture at the flat ending to her own excitement. She found the severe glance which her older sister directed toward her anything but agreeable.

"I wish you wouldn't look at me that way, Jocelyn," she broke out, "as if I had done something perfectly dreadful! I guess you wouldn't like to have your room locked against you even if you did happen to share it with an authoress. Of course I wanted to know what she was always staying off by herself for nowadays, when we used to play and to do everything together. If it was anything disgraceful I had found out—but something to be proud of—"

"Oh, but Jem," Jocelyn almost groaned; "If I could only make you understand that you have no right to 'find out' things at all! That people have just as much ownership in



their thoughts and their feelings and their doings, if they are not wrong, and that is not for you to pry into—as they have in their books or their clothes or their money, or anything! If you would only see that you have actually robbed Janet of something she prized—”

But here Jem interrupted indignantly, her round open face flushing very red;

“Now Jocelyn,” she protested, “I can’t take that sort of talk, not even from you. It’s the first time I ever heard a Jerome accused of being a—a—I won’t even say the word!” she added proudly.

But Jocelyn persisted. “I have no wish to say the word either, Jem, but I must do what I can to make you see how really dishonorable such prying and meddling are. If you don’t check this dreadful curiosity of yours you will certainly get into some trouble one of these days which will hurt you as much as you hurt poor Janet to-day. And I’m afraid——”

“I didn’t mean to hurt Janet!” broke in the culprit, her face puckering up, and beginning to cry. “I reckon I love Janet just as well as any of you, even if she don’t seem to love me any more! I didn’t suppose—I never thought—I just wanted to show you all what pretty things she could write. I thought you’d all be



pleased, and then she'd be pleased too. And instead of that——”

“But don't you see; that's just the point,” urged her sister more gently. “You had no right to do anything of this sort without Janet's permission. I know you love Janet, and I know she loves you too; you mustn't think she doesn't—and you didn't mean to hurt her. But you were so excited at having your curiosity satisfied that you didn't mean *not* to; and I'm afraid you have hurt her, worse than if you had torn up her favorite story-book, or spilled ink on her beloved autograph-album. If you can't realize it yourself, you must take the word of an older person, who understands things better, and make yourself feel that it is so.”

Jem wiped her eyes disconsolately with the corner of her little white apron.

“I s'pose I shall have to feel it,” she said contritely, “since you all make such a time about it. Mercy! I never thought Janet could get into such a fury! And I should be so proud if it was me;—Joe, too, he had to look at me as if I wasn't any bigger in his sight than, than—a *pin* ;” and the little fair freckled face flushed again at the remembrance of her brother's loftily disapproving glance. “And you were all so busy despising me,



you didn't take time to think what you've got to be proud of. I tell you, Jocelyn, that was an awful nice kind of a story, the one I brought down here. You just ought to coax Janet to let you read it, now the dreadful deed is done, and everybody knows. I s'pose she's off somewhere crying, and I s'pose she wouldn't let me go near her. If she would, I'd go and tell her how sorry I am—I am sorry——”

The childish voice broke, and Jocelyn drew the contrite little figure toward her, and put her arm kindly about the little shoulders that shook with sobbing.

“I guess she would get over it if you told her so,” she said consolingly, and then, her tone becoming very grave: “But I wish, dear, I could feel that you felt sorry for having done wrong as well as for having hurt Janet; then I should feel more hopeful for the future. You know what I mean, Jem; you go to church and to Sunday-school; you know who is displeased when you let a fault grow upon you, and who would help you to overcome it. If you would only begin to think about yourself, and what you do, and what you are, in real good earnest; if you wouldn't just think of what you learn there as a sermon to be heard, a lesson to be said, but try to bring it into your own life——”



"You do, don't you, Jocelyn," sighed poor, discomfited Jem, as her sister paused, herself a little shy in speaking openly of such things. "Indeed, I think you are real good, J. J., 'most as good as mother was her own self."

"Oh no, no; I am only trying," interposed the young girl hastily, "and you will promise me to try, won't you, Jem? Try the right way, I mean; well then, there's a kiss for this time, and don't let there be any next time like this, I beg of you! Now I am going to look for poor little Janet, and you must finish hearing Jessie's lesson. We were having a nice time playing school, weren't we, little one?"

Jocelyn mounted up to the third story to Janet's room, but Janet was not there, nor in Joe's nor Juliet's chamber. The door at the top of the garret stairs was unlatched however, and Jocelyn climbed up the steep steps, and stood for a moment looking round the big unused apartment, where the light came dimly through the dusty windows, where cobwebs hung in flimsy festoons from the rafters, and the sound of the pigeons cooing in the eaves seemed just at one's ear.

Another sound more mournful still than their brooding melancholy note struck upon her listening ear, the low tired sob of a child worn out with crying, and sending her glance in the



direction from which it came, she espied the luckless little authoress huddled down in one of the deep dormer windows, and looking the picture of angry woe.

Jocelyn sat down on the floor beside her and drew the pale, tear-stained face upon her breast. Janet would have pulled it away, but her sister kept her arm about her, and stroked the wet cheeks with loving hand. "Poor little girl, it was too bad, too bad," she said in her comforting voice. "But don't cry any more now, dearie," as the sobs began to come thicker and faster again; "she is just as sorry and ashamed as you can want her to be, poor little meddling Jem; and I think it will be a lesson to her, will help her to try to get the better of her curiosity——"

"Yes, maybe; but that won't undo the mischief she's done!" cried Janet, her passionate resentment but little abated by this representation.

"No, not exactly," yielded Jocelyn, still stroking the tear-stained face, and the ruffled hair with soothing touch.

"But since it is done and can't be undone, I am sure you wouldn't wish to bear malice, and will let her being sorry count for something. And what may comfort you more than that, Janet dear, let's look at it all a minute, and see



if, except for the annoyance of Jem's prying and telling without your permission, there is anything so terrible about it after all! Why, my clever little sister, why should you mind so very much letting us all know what a gift you possess! Don't you know we should all be pleased and proud about it, of course!"

"Oh, don't, Jocelyn!" protested the child, and Jocelyn felt the little reddening face grow hot against her shoulder. "Gift, indeed! I've got no gift,—I only wish I had! I'd rather be able to write than to play or sing or paint, or, anything else in the world. But I can't—it's only that things come into my head, and I like to put them down as well as I can. And it makes me happy—or it used to!—and it does nobody any harm, and I thought I had a right to keep it to my own self if I wanted to."

"Yes—but why did you want to, so very much, dear?"

"Oh because—because—Jocelyn, if you ever did it yourself you'd understand! Your poor little thoughts—why, they're just a part of yourself; you don't want to have 'em dragged out, and maybe, made fun of, and repeated, and thrown up at you if you don't live quite up to them! Joe would tease, I know; and Jem would chatter, and Juliet would look away off over the top of my head,——"



“And I, what would I do, dear?” Jocelyn’s voice had a little accent of reproach in it.

“Oh, you would think I was a silly girl, I expect; because I suppose the things are silly; and you would all feel as if I was setting up to be different, or something——”

“On the contrary, my dear, I shouldn’t have thought you silly at all. I’m very glad to know you have the taste for such an innocent and pleasant way of passing your time, and I think, even if it should never come to anything more, it will help you to write neat-looking and interesting letters. And as for the others, I think you’re mistaken about them too, dear: I’m afraid you are a little over-sensitive, and that is a pity for any one, because it makes one suspicious and ready to take offence when none is intended, or if it is meant, to feel it more keenly than is worth while. I rather think, little girl, that if we should find we had a genius in the family we should be very proud of it! And if all poor little Jem says about your work is true, I really think we have reason to be proud. Come now, be good, try to get over it, won’t you, and let sister see your little story. She don’t like to feel that she is kept out of anything that is so much in your life, Janet!”



The child hesitated still, shifting the crumpled sheets of paper uneasily in her hands.

"I never showed them to any body but, but mother," she faltered. "I knew she, she would——"

"And I will too, darling," said Jocelyn, divining the rest of the sentence. "I will understand too, and be interested, and sympathize if you will let me. I want to be as much like mother to all of you as I can, Janet! But you must remember *I* have lost her too, and I need you all to love me——"

Her own voice broke a little, and Janet, touched by this sudden new thought with regard to her big, grown-up sister, threw her arms impulsively about her neck and kissed her.

"I do love you, Jocelyn," she said; "I do think you are good and sweet, and I will let you read my foolish little story if you want to. I don't know whether you can make it out; it is only in pencil, and such a scrawl—but there it is!"

She put the crumpled roll into Jocelyn's hand, and getting up from her cramped posture on the floor walked shyly away to a window at the other end of the long low-raftered room, and stood looking nervously out upon the tree-tops tossing in the high spring wind.



Her sister smoothed out the creased pages, and settled herself back against the wall to decipher the unformed childish writing as best she might: we will take the privilege of looking over her shoulder and reading with her!

“THE MAGIC RIVERS.”\*

“Oh dear! if I only could run away and not go to school any more,” said Sara as she was slowly walking down the road one day. “I just wish I could run away to some place where I wouldn’t have to do anything unless I wanted to.”

And saying this, she stopped on the bridge to watch the gurgling stream as it flowed over the rocks.

She had been leaning on the rail of the bridge when suddenly it gave way and splash! she went into the water; down, down, down, she went, and landed right in the midst of a lovely green meadow.

Suddenly she heard a musical little voice, though she could see nothing, but soon she saw approaching her a band of beautiful little people no taller than a pin, but as lovely as they could be. They took her to a beautiful palace

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\* The stories ascribed to Janet in this volume are the work of a dear and gifted little friend of the writer, Jennie Curtis Appleby of Washington, D. C., who is just Janet’s age.



all lighted up, and presently a fairy stepped out of the door, touched Sarah with her wand, and lo, she grew smaller and smaller until she was just as small as the little people themselves. "Come," said the queen (for that was the title of the one who came out of the palace), "come with me and I will show you a sight you never saw before."

Sara followed the fairy queen to a lovely garden filled with violets, roses, pansies, and heliotrope.

"Oh, what beauties!" exclaimed Sara. "I have never seen such lovely flowers before. But the violets are prettiest of all, and how sweet they smell!"

"Yes," said one of the little maids of honor; "violets are the sweetest of all, for they are her majesty's favorite flower."

But here the queen said, "Come with me; I have something to show you." Sara was wondering what it was, when they came to the bank of a river.

"This is the river of Idleness," said the queen, "look into it."

Sara looked, and down in the bottom (for it was clear as crystal), she saw drunken ragged men and women and half naked children with matted hair. Some of the men with pipes in their mouths leaned against houses,



some of the women sprawled on the sidewalks, others were engaged in angry brawls, but all were dirty, ragged, and unhappy. "Oh!" said Sara, "take me away. I have seen enough."

"Follow me," said the queen, "I have something else to show you."

"Oh, please don't!" cried Sara, in an agony.

"I think you will like it," said the queen, "so come along."

Sara was encouraged by this, so she went without saying any more, and soon they came to another river.

"This," said the queen, "is the river of Industry," and looking down through the clear sparkling water she saw little ants and squirrels laying in their winter stores, and bright, neatly-dressed boys and girls going to school. The men were all healthy and fine-looking, the women pleasant and tidy, and everybody seemed gay and happy, while the birds sang and the squirrels dropped nuts from the trees. From here the queen took Sara to the bed of violets, and picking some of the prettiest handed them to her. Just then a breathless little page came running up and dropped at the queen's feet, exclaiming "Your Majesty, Fairy Sunbeam has just returned from her tour



around the world, and awaits you in the parlor."

"She will have to wait a little while," replied the queen. At which the little fairy jumped up and ran away.

"Suppose," said Sara timidly to the queen, "there was a little girl who had been idle all her life; is there any help for her?"

"Why yes, if that person tries hard to overcome it. But you had better go home now, or your mother will miss you. Here, take these violets, and every time you look at them, they will remind you of the lesson of the Magic Rivers."

When Jocelyn had finished reading this artless little tale, she too, got up from her rather uncomfortable position upon the floor, and walked quickly (a little smile, half amusement, half pleasure on her face), over to the window where Janet stood awaiting her in embarrassed silence. The child did not move as her sister approached, but Jocelyn threw her arm around her and gave her a good comforting squeeze.

"Why you dear little thing, you!" she exclaimed. "I hadn't the least idea you could do anything half so good. Why, it is just as I told you, I am as pleased and proud as I can be!"



Janet gave a little gasp, and flashed a quick entreating glance from her big gray eyes.

“Yes, I do truly mean what I say. I think your little story is just as cute, as you children say, as can be. I don't mean to flatter you at all, and of course, it is a little queer and abrupt in form, but that don't matter; the art of composition will come by practice, and by observation, as you get older. But it shows that you have ideas, very bright little ideas of your own, and a pretty fanciful way of expressing them. I am really surprised at the ease and vividness with which you express yourself, you child, you! You really make us see everything that Sara saw. But what I like best of all is the inner side of your little fairy story, dear. It shows that our Janet has been thinking about herself, about her own besetting fault.”

“Yes, and that's one reason why I didn't want them all to read it. I know how lazy I am about getting up mornings, and how I hate to move, to do anything for anybody, when I get settled down with a book. I know it is selfish, and I wanted to try—but can't try half so well when I know people are watching to see whether I fail or not——”

“Ah, but that is just another of your temptations you must struggle against, Janet, dear. You are apt to think too much about yourself



and your own feelings, to brood over things, and imagine other people are thinking this and that about you. It makes you suspicious and over-sensitive; people in a family ought to be free and open with each other, and give and take in a good-natured way, not bearing a bit of malice. We all love each other, I am sure, and we all have plenty of faults of our own, so we can't afford to be over-critical. And I think you would be happier, dear, if you were less sensitive, and less secretive. You see you were very anxious to guard against any chance of your own feelings being hurt by teasing or joking, but you forgot to think how hard it would be for Jem with her big bump of curiosity, to find her own door locked against her——”

“I always opened it when she came—I told you that before, Jocelyn!—and besides, mother always said Jem's curiosity must be checked.”

“Yes, but having mysteries and secrets like that is the way to stimulate, not to check it, don't you think? And besides, Janet, put yourself in her place now; how would you like it, if *she* were the first one to break away, when you have always done everything together so, and have a separate interest, all to herself and that kept so secret——”

“Oh well, Jocelyn, Jem is such a rattle-pate;



she and Joe are better company for each other after all. I can't help feeling a difference as I get older; and besides, all those things come into my head of my own accord, and I can't help liking to put them down--and she wouldn't understand--"

"Ah, but there you don't do her justice, my dear. She does understand--she appreciated your little story to the full, and was generously glad you could do what seemed to her such a wonderful thing, something she is quite sure she could never do herself. So now, in consideration of that, I want you to forgive her for doing what, of course, she had no right to do; and to help her by not making a secret of it any more. I understand just how such a thing must always be more or less sacred to one's own self; but I am pretty sure if you didn't shut yourself up and seem so determined to keep apart, Jem is too good-hearted to intrude; there would be nothing to pique her curiosity, and there would be no more trouble. And when you can bring yourself to be quite open with us all about it, and give us the pleasure of sharing your pretty little fancies, why, I know we shall all be very glad, and think a great deal more of enjoying them, than of teasing or criticising. If you would only let father see this, now-----"



But Janet gave a little shrinking start.

“Oh no, not yet, Jocelyn, please! Not till I have done something better worth showing—something—”

“Very well, dear. I understand, and it shall be just as you feel about it. I am only glad that such a sweet and pure interest has come to you. I hope it may grow into something that will be a power for good in your own life, and in others’; and I shall trust you not to let it bring pain even into naughty little Jem’s. Come on now, dear, and let us go down; it is Saturday afternoon, and there are a dozen things waiting for me to do. Give me a kiss, and then find Jem, and give her one too!”

But Janet was not quite equal to that. The child was by nature almost morbidly sensitive and reticent; it was always a positive pain to her to talk over herself, or be talked over: there had been quite as much of it already as she felt able to stand, and moreover, her resentment against the profane hands that had daringly rent away the veil from her precious secret, was not yet quite abated.

“It will be a good lesson for her if she does think I’m real mad with her,” she thought, with the severity of the young; and so, instead of going in search of the culprit, she made her escape to her own room, and threw herself



down on the bed to think it all over, and to rest her head which really ached with all the excitement.

Jem sent two or three wistful looks in her direction at dinner, but it was not till they were tucked together in bed at night that she herself found courage to speak. Her loving little heart could not stand it then to have her sister lie straight and stiff on the edge of the bed, her face turned away from her. Cuddling close up to her, she stole a little plump arm around her and whispered, half sobbing, into the back of her neck, "I'm awful sorry, Janet. Don't be angry with me any longer. 'Member, we've both said our prayers." Janet turned over and put her arm round Jem also.

"I know it, and I do forgive you," she said. "But, Jem, you don't know how hard it was, and you must never bring any of—of those things—down-stairs any more, nor talk about them to the others. And if you won't, I'll let *you* go and read them when you want to—only not when I am in the room!"

"Well!" exclaimed Jem, drawing a deep breath of surprise and pleasure at this unexpected concession; "If you ain't just a dear, then I don't know!"



## CHAPTER VII.

### JOCELYN HAS HER SAY.

“**W**HERE is Joe this evening?” asked Mr. Jerome one night coming out of his study into the sitting-room where the girls were gathered about the evening lamp.

“Out round somewhere; some boys came for him,” responded Jem.

“But I don’t wish him to be ‘out round somewhere,’ wherever that may be, little girl. I want him in the house of an evening. I thought he usually sat here with you all, and studied his lessons.”

“It is Friday, you know, papa,” remarked Juliet, looking up from her embroidery.

“Ah, so it is,” said her father, as if recollecting; “well, I suppose that means there is no studying this evening, but all the same, I want him in the house by this time. I think he must have gone into the town; I have just come in from a stroll about the place myself; I didn’t see anything of him. I don’t want him in the streets at this hour; a boy learns no good there.”



"It is light so late now, father," said Jem. "Just think—it is April! Before we know it, summer will be here, and vacation; and oh, won't I be glad!"

"It doesn't matter if it is light," her father persisted. "It is nearly nine o'clock, and I won't have my boy away from home at that hour. I wonder he ventures to stay out so late without leave! Or, did Jocelyn, perhaps, send him somewhere? Where is Jocelyn, by the way?"

"Putting Jessie to sleep," answered speaker Jem. "Nonsense," coldly observed Juliet. "Jessie's asleep long ago. She plays so hard all day she's off the minute her head touches the pillow. Jocelyn is sitting up at the window star-gazing, I don't doubt: anyone might suppose she had taken a sudden new interest in astronomy, she studies the moon and stars so much."

Mr. Jerome looked at his daughter with a puzzled expression, as if a little perplexed at both words and tone, but he made no comment. He only said with a little anxious sigh,

"Well, I wish it could be so that you would all sit here together in the evening as you used to. I like to think of things going on the same, as——"

"Well, father," broke in Jem, as he paused,



"if you would only come and sit with us too sometimes! Don't you remember what nice times we used to have playing games? Let's have a game of Authors to-night, won't you, and you play with us?"

"Yes," said Janet, looking up from her book; "I like to play Authors: that's the nicest of them all. Will you, father?"

But Mr. Jerome visibly shrank from the proposal. He desired to know that the family life was going on safely and happily in the old peaceful way; but the wound in his heart was still too sore for him to forget it for a moment. It would cost more of an effort than he yet felt able or willing to make, to sit down familiarly as of old in the room which her presence had made home; to see her chair empty, or filled by another; to take part, without her, in any of the old simple amusements of which she had been the life and soul.

"No, not to-night, I think," he excused himself hastily; "I have something to do—I am busy. But—a—just tell Joe when he comes in I want to speak to him, will you, and I've no doubt Jocelyn will come down if you ask her, my dears. I have something I wish to attend to to-night," and he withdrew hurriedly into his own sanctum.

"Poor Jocelyn! Everything's got to de-



pend upon her!" said Jem with a comical little sigh. "But I reckon I'd better tell her, he likes her to be down here."

She got up, stretched her arms over her head, and prepared to go to call her sister, but Juliet interposed in her usual neutral tone:

"I don't quite see that Jocelyn has any more to do than the rest of us. We have to be in school most of the day, and have our practicing and our lessons afterward, and anyhow, you mustn't disturb her if you feel she is so overtasked. Three of us are enough to play if you want a game."

"Oh, well," said Jem; "father seems to want us all to be together; and I like to have somebody round that, that seems to be the real head, you know, no offence to you, Jule!" and away she went to look for the one who had undertaken to fill the mother's place.

She found her sitting, as Juliet had suggested, at her window, dimly outlined in the dusk, and gazing upward toward the sky, where the silver crescent of the moon was gliding swiftly in and out, in and out, among the pearly cloud-islets that flecked the dark blue upper ocean of the heavens.

"Oh, isn't it pretty!" cried the little girl, stopping beside her sister and following her upward glance. "It's just as if she was playing



bo-peep! with the clouds, isn't it? But Jocelyn, what makes you want to sit staring at it so long? Jule says you're studying astronomy. Come on, won't you, down-stairs, and let's play games, or have some music, or something. Joe's out, and father's been in. He don't like it, and he wants us all to be together."

Jocelyn had given a little start and a sudden flush had come into her cheek as Jem was speaking; now she turned and looked at her with some anxiety.

"Joe out again so late?" she exclaimed. "Why he promised me only last night——"

"Yes, we didn't tell father he had been out ever so many evenings before; but you know, he oughtn't, Jocelyn," supplemented Jem, sagely.

"Why of course he ought not! And he promised me if I wouldn't speak to father about it, that last night should be the end of it." I trusted his word, and I felt a little tired this evening and it was so lovely here at the window, I thought I might just sit here and be quiet awhile." Poor Jocelyn's voice had a touch of unwonted impatience in it. "But I suppose the time has gone by forever when I can feel free to take a few minutes to myself. Well, all right, Jem. Go on down, I'll come in a



moment; shut the door softly so as not to wake Jessie. She was restless this evening."

But the little girl did not move at once; she stood with her hand upon her sister's shoulder, looking down into the flushed and disturbed face, usually so sweet and kindly. Why should any one, she was pondering in her small mind, prefer to sit off all alone, gazing at the moon, even suppose it was brighter and prettier than usual, rather than be down-stairs where there were light and people and something going on? It was more than Jem could divine; she had not reached the age when she could feel the glamour of the

"silver lights and darks,"

or find the pleasantest company in one's own dreamy thoughts.

"Poor J. J.," she said in her quaint little wise way: "it's pretty hard for you to have to be the mother, isn't it, before you're any more than just grown-up yourself! Never mind; you needn't come down if you don't want to; we girls are big enough to take care of ourselves, and as for Mr. Joe, father's going to give him a talking-to himself."

"Oh, I didn't want it to come to that!" said Jocelyn, distressed that her father should be annoyed, and anxious lest he should perhaps



think her remiss. "I thought I could influence Joe myself; I didn't want to lay any positive orders upon him,—boys resent that so; and the other boys are out, and he don't see why he can't be too, now that it isn't dark till late. But I talked to him over and over again, and told him I should have to speak to father—and now he has broken his word!—Well; I want to be down-stairs when he comes in—I shall be down immediately, Jem."

She turned to draw down the shade a little lest some stray moonbeam should steal in and lay a tricky finger upon the little sleeper's eyes, breaking their sweet spell of slumber; and as she did so she lifted one last glance to the silver-flooded sky.

"It seems to bridge the distance between us," she said, to herself wistfully, "when I think the same beautiful moon, the same shining stars, are looking down upon us both. But, oh, Dick, it's a long distance, for all that, and I do miss you so!"

"Come on, Jocelyn," called Jem from the landing, and she turned hastily and went down-stairs with her little sister. The others were waiting with the Author-cards scattered over the table. "What a time you have been!" said Juliet. "It's hardly worth while to begin now."



But Jem said, "Oh yes!" and Jocelyn began to distribute them at once with hands that were not quite so steady as usual, and the game they were all wont to enjoy was started without more delay. But for some reason or other, it did not proceed with the usual animation: Juliet was chill and silent, and Jocelyn seemed to be listening and watching for something. When, at nearly ten o'clock, there was the cautious sound of the colonnade-door being stealthily opened, she was the first of the players to hear it, and started involuntarily from her seat. But as she opened the sitting-room door, she saw her father coming out of the study into the hall. His face looked grave and stern, and he motioned her back:

"I will see the young man myself," he said, and the next moment, the truant, slipping noiselessly along the passage toward the stairs, found himself confronted by his father's tall figure standing at the foot, and received the unwelcome invitation,

"Come into my study, please, for a moment. I want to talk with you a little."

Jocelyn stepped back hastily into the sitting-room, and took up her cards with a nervous little laugh. "Let's see, where were we?" she said, "Dickens, Doddridge, Defoe,—oh, I want to tell you all such a pretty little story I came



across to-day about Dickens—" and so she went on hurriedly, making talk while she distributed the cards, and trying to prevent the sound of voices in the next room from being heard.

They were heard, nevertheless; the father's low, but stern and decided, the boy's sullen and resentful. Presently Jem could contain herself no longer.

"My!" she said in an awed undertone, "isn't father talking as if he meant it, though! I wonder Joe dare keep on answering him that way."

"Mean it? Of course he means it," said Juliet. "The idea of a youngster like Joe thinking he can go off like this of an evening, and stay out all hours with a lot of boys who are not taken any better care of themselves! If I had any thing to say about it——"

"Well, please don't say anything about it, Juliet," hastily interposed her older sister. "To Joe I mean; he is peculiar, you know—he has to be managed——"

"Oh, don't be afraid," was Juliet's chill rejoinder. "I haven't the slightest intention of interfering with any of your prerogatives."

"Oh, you know I didn't mean that, Juliet!" expostulated Jocelyn, and Jem whistled softly.

"Whew!" she said, "can't Jule right natur-



ally curl when she's a mind to! Why, Janet, for all you're an authoress,—oh dear, I didn't mean to say that! I only meant to say I didn't believe even you could get off such a high-sounding sentence as that!"

Her consternation at having touched upon the forbidden topic was so comical that they all broke into an involuntary laugh, and Jocelyn promptly made use of the diversion to say, "Come, that will do for you now, Jem. It is high time you were going to bed; and you, too Janet, my dear. There won't be any getting either of you up in the morning. Are you coming, too, Juliet? Shall I put the light out, or will you?"

"Oh, I'm coming," said Juliet, and Jocelyn was glad, for now Joe would be able to get up to his own room without having to encounter any curious or disapproving glances on the way; and knowing his temper, she thought this was best. She went into his room however, and left upon the table where he would see it a book which he had asked her to get from the library for him that day.

"He's wanted that 'Stanley' for so long, and it was always out," she said to herself. "Maybe it will keep him from going to sleep feeling sulky, naughty fellow! I shall have something to say to him on my own account as soon



as I get a good chance !” And then she slipped back into her own room as she heard him come stamping heavily, and she feared sullenly, up the stair.

Her father stopped at her door a few minutes later.

“Have you gone to bed yet, Jocelyn?” he asked. “No? then I would like to speak with you a few minutes,” and he came in and closed the door behind him. “It is about that boy of ours, Joe,” he said, and she saw that his look and tone were anxious. “I’m afraid he is falling into bad ways. Southworth, the principal of the academy, stopped me as I was coming home this afternoon, and walked up street with me talking about him. He tells me he was absent from school yesterday and brought no excuse to-day. And when I asked him how this was, Joe, I mean, he owned that he had deliberately played truant—strayed away, he called it—because he wanted to go fishing with Bill Toliver and the Dix boys down the river.”

“And did he really go?” asked Jocelyn, amazed.

“So he tells me. And when I demanded to know how he could justify such high-handed conduct, he informed me that he ‘s’posed it was the spring fever in his blood; he was just possessed to get on the water, and he hadn’t any



other chance. He'd rather the boys had waited till Saturday, but they wouldn't, and so he just went along.' ”

Some subtle change in her father's tone made Jocelyn look up at him, and she caught a twinkle of amusement in his eye. She put her hand up on his shoulder and said half coaxingly, half mischievously, “ Well, and didn't you like to go fishing when you were a boy, papa ? ”

Mr. Jerome's grave face relaxed still more. “ Why yes, I did certainly,” he said, “ but I never played ‘ hookey ’ from school to do it, Miss ! Your grandfather had a plantation, you know, a big farm down on the bay-shore, and half our living came out of the water, fish and oysters and crabs and clams. Many's the mess of spots I've caught before breakfast, and helped to eat 'em an hour after ; yes and many the the great sheep'shead and porgy I've helped to haul in when it seemed an even chance if they wouldn't haul me in first ! But then, those were the old times ; there were always plenty of old experienced darky fishermen to go along and look after us ; and we learned to handle a boat ourselves. But Joe—he knows nothing about a boat, and I doubt if those other boys know much more. It makes me fairly wince now when I think he was out on the river with them all day,



and might as easily have gone to the bottom as not. And then the audacity of the thing—that little chap daring to take matters in his own hands that way! Why, if he does these things in the green tree, how will it be in the dry?”

“Joe is small for his age,” remarked Jocelyn. “You know he is nearly fourteen, father.”

“Well, what of that?” said her father with some impatience. “All the worse; he’ll be feeling independent all the sooner. And I can’t have it, Jocelyn; I can’t have him going off at his own will and pleasure, and staying out nights, and running with that wild, lawless set of fellows. They are older than he is, and allowed to do pretty much as they like; and the first thing we know, we shall have Joe learning to use bad language, and to smoke cigarettes—” her father did not notice the sudden start Jocelyn gave—it might have been only the moonlight that still flashed and faded, hurrying to and fro, in and out of the silvery clouds—” and I do wish, Jocelyn, child, you would try to devise some means of keeping him interested at home after school hours. I know you have a great deal devolving on you already, my dear, too much for your youth and inexperience—but if you could try, it is a matter of such importance, just at this critical period in a boy’s



life. I don't want to be harsh and stern with him; I should only lose his confidence; and I want him—I want you all—to love me and to feel I am your friend; you have no other now, poor things!”

His voice broke, and Jocelyn laid her cheek upon the arm that still rested on his shoulder, with a caressing gesture.

“But Joe must be taken more firmly in hand, and if you could help me, my dear; if it could be made pleasant and interesting for him in the house——”

“I do try, father,” said Jocelyn, “I will try more. But father——” she hesitated a moment, and then went bravely on; “don't you think it would be more likely to help if you would—don't think I am presuming, father—if you could just bring yourself to show a little more interest, to join in things the way you used to; a boy gets so tired of being always just with a parcel of girls, his own sisters, too; and staying in the house makes such a Miss Molly of him! Only Joe never could be a Miss Molly, and so there would just be more and more trouble as he gets older. But if you——” she plunged on eagerly as she saw her father's disturbed and reluctant look, “in this very matter of going on the water, father. Joe has got his love for it straight from you, it seems; and if



you could only plan to get him a boat of his own, and go with him to teach him how to use it, I think it would be so perfectly delightful for us all, now that the summer is coming on, and the evenings will be so long and mild. Oh, I think it would be just charming—to have that to look forward to all through the long hot days, and to have you with us again, and to know that the boy is happy and safe, don't you think so, father? Oh, I'm just sure you would enjoy it, and that it would be the very nicest thing in the world for all of us!"

Mr. Jerome looked at his daughter in surprise, and some amusement. He had never heard his big, grown-up girl beg for anything in that fashion, before: it touched him in a tender way too, for he understood readily enough, that while she was speaking one word for herself, it was two for Joe, and perhaps three for her sad-hearted father, whom she would fain rouse from the torpor of solitary grief. He had put aside the prompting of his own conscience suggesting from time to time a hint of possible self-indulgence, in keeping himself so aloof from his children in their common sorrow; but it had come to him now in a way which he could not ignore. He stood silent a moment, casting a troubled glance about the room which had once been his own and his wife's; in every corner of which



memories were grouped, every object in which had some tender association. He was thinking perhaps, "Yes, youth is elastic; can spring up again, alive and bright, no matter how crushing the blow; but I—can I ever enjoy anything again?"

But he said nothing of this: presently he put aside his own feeling with a brief stifled sigh, and went back to the idea Jocelyn had suggested.

"It is a good notion," he said; "I don't think I have forgotten my old skill in water-craft, and I should certainly be very glad to provide you all with such a pleasure. But, my dear, have you any idea of the cost of a boat large enough to carry such a crew?"

Jocelyn looked a little disconcerted. "No, I haven't, not the slightest," she admitted; but then, her look brightening, "but father, we would all help toward paying for it. We would save part of it out of the housekeeping! I'm sure we wouldn't any of us mind doing without desserts for awhile, and having less cake and sweet meats, and that sort of thing, for such a pleasant purpose as that. And we girls could get on without many new dresses this summer. O, father, indeed we would all enjoy it so, the boating itself, and having you with us, I feel quite certain we would be willing to give up most anything."



Mr. Jerome's countenance relaxed into something like a smile.

"Oh, I don't think I should find it necessary to starve my children, or even to 'let the little colts go bare'," he said. "I dare say I could manage the cost of the boat without much effort; but there is another point, the most important one perhaps, which we have not touched upon at all. Does even an indulgent sister like yourself think Joe should be rewarded—by such a gift—when it is punishment he most certainly deserves?"

But Jocelyn met him there. "Yes, father," she said earnestly, "I have thought of that, and I'll tell you what I think. You are not Joe's school-master; you are not exactly the law in this instance. His offence was first against Mr. Southworth; let him settle it with the young man according to the rules of the school, and you let Joe know that you quite endorse whatever he does, and let it have what effect it will. And then, you be the kind father, and let him see that you do care about his wishes and his pleasures, and that you want to help him not to be naughty just as much or more, as to have him suffer after he has been naughty. See, father!"

Mr. Jerome met her coaxing look with a touched and softened glance.



"Oh yes, I see you are your mother's own daughter!" he said hastily in a deeply moved tone, and stooping to put his lips to her cheek. "Well—I'll think it over; I'll please you if I can—" and with this, he was gone, but he left his daughter fairly glowing in the moonlight with sweet surprise and pleasure. A kiss from her father—it meant so much; and his precious words! how happy they made her, for she knew he could have found no higher praise for her.

"Oh, how glad I am he feels that way about me!" she said over and over to herself, as she moved softly about the room preparing for bed. "Of course I know I don't deserve it; and yet, I do try, and by God's help, I shall try more and more, to fill her dear place. And it is a help to know that what you do is appreciated, and especially by the one you care most to please. Dear father—if I can only see him happy, or at least not so unhappy—once more! And I'm sure this plan of the boat will help to bring us all more together as in the old times; only, Master Joe, you are going to be made to understand that it is by grace and not by desert you get it!"

She did not appear to take any more notice of the young man than usual next morning, and the others, busy in their own preparations



for school seemed not to recollect that anything unusual had happened. But Jocelyn saw her father hand him a note, at which Joe made rather a wry face, and conjectured that he was leaving the affair of "playing hookey" in the school-master's hands.

"Poor little chap! I wonder what he will do to him?" Jocelyn said to herself more than once that day; and she purposely arranged her household affairs, so as to be walking slowly down the other side of the way along the street on which the academy stood just at the hour when the boys came rushing pell-mell down the steps, and scattering hither and thither in the direction of their various homes. She discovered Joe readily enough, for the school was not large; nothing was large in Oakleigh except the great wide-spreading trees from which it took its name, and the big, old-fashioned flower-gardens attached to almost all of the low-pitched, rambling old uses, and which scented the April air now with the perfume of myriads of early violets, jonquils, and hyacinths.

Joe saw his sister too, and would have preferred to walk off in another direction; but he did not quite like to disregard her beckoning finger, and came across the street, looking sulky and reluctant enough.

"What is it? What do you want with me,



Jocelyn," he asked. "I'm in a hurry; I've got lots to do."

"Oh, have you," said his sister, with a little note of disappointment in her voice. "Couldn't it wait awhile? I wanted so much to get some fresh water-lily pods for the pond in the garden; the old ones seem to be all dying out, and you know we don't want to give up our water-lily pond, Joe."

"Yes," Joe knew, and he knew the reason why; because it was the mother's special pride in all her gardening, and the pond-lily perhaps the best beloved of all the flowers she loved so well. The boy could remember how she used almost always to wear one in her bosom of an evening in their blooming-time; he could see it now, the soft creamy-white leaves with the golden centre; and suddenly a breath of the faint sweet odor seemed to be floating toward him on the delicate April air.

"It is the time to set them out now," Jocelyn went on; "but I don't like to go down to the river-side alone, or with just the girls. There are apt to be men and boys roaming round, and I thought I could count on you as an escort."

Joe's gruff look softened a little; his remembrance of his mother was deeper and tenderer than he believed they knew, which was one reason of his gruffness nowadays; and then it



tickled his boyish vanity to think that his big grown-up sister, such a tall, stately-looking girl as Jocelyn was, could feel any sense of protection in his company! There was some suspicion however in the glance which he cast furtively toward her pleasant face:

"She looks as if she didn't know, but I'll bet she does. Anyhow I'm not going to play sneak about it."

So he blurted out, "All right; I'll go with you if you want me. The dominie has given me two hundred lines extra of Virgil to pay for my frolic the other day——"

Jocelyn drew a little breath of relief. She had been mortally afraid of a flogging, and she had an intuitive conviction that however well that might serve the purpose with some boys, it would be a mistake with a lad of Joe's sensitive high-strung temperament.

"But I can get up earlier in the morning and peg away at that," he went on; "the fun was worth it. So come ahead if you want to. I'll try to keep the bears and wild cats off o' you."

Jocelyn laughed with a little secret sense of triumph, and said "that's a good fellow;" and they went on together, down the rough, steep street that led to the river side, and along its banks by a little beaten path made by the fish-



ermen and other water-side work people, until they had left the straggling town behind them, and entered a bit of woodland, made dim and shady by great old forest trees, and carpeted by smooth pine-shatters, or moss as soft and green as velvet. The river flowed on there softly and brightly through sunshine and shadow; there was not even a strolling negro in sight; and Jocelyn set to work, her mind at ease, to fill, with Joe's help, the basket she had brought for her lily-pods. They were already out in their new leaves of tender green, floating like fairy boats upon the quiet water, and in such quantities that Joe, paddling himself out to their beds on a bit of board with a pine sapling, soon had pulled up more than the basket would contain; and poling himself back to the shore, sat down on a heap of shatters, and proceeded leisurely to put on again the shoes and stockings which he pulled off, for fear of a sudden tip-over on his improvised raft.

"Oh they are lovely, just so, without any flowers," exclaimed his sister, laying the glossy dripping leaves in the basket with loving hands: "but how glad I shall be to see them opening out their great blossoms in mother's pond! I believe I like wild woodsy things even better than the garden fine-ladies after all!"



Joe tied his last shoe string, and gave his foot a stamp.

"Well," he said, "there's plenty of wild flowers, violets and bluets and such, farther along up stream; come ahead, and I'll get you as many as you like."

They strayed on a little further along the grassy bank, but Jocelyn presently checked her steps at sight of a tempting seat made by the gnarled roots of an old tree, whose wide-spreading branches reached out over the river, and took possession of the mossy cushion.

"No, Joe, thank you; I don't believe I'll go wild flower gathering this afternoon; the girls wouldn't like it that I hadn't brought them; but the lilies, you know, only you could help me with. We can all come out together Saturday afternoon and gather the dear little bluets, and the anemones ought to be out by that time, too. Just now, I believe I feel like resting," and she leaned her back against the great tree-trunk, and looked out over the water where a bevy of birds were skimming along the glassy tide.

"What a lovely old river this of ours is just here, isn't it, Joe," she said. "How clear and deep the water looks, and how swift the current is! Wouldn't it be fun, Joe, if we only had a boat, and could row up here, evenings,



this summer and see the sunset and the moon-rise?"

"Humph!" said Joe, "I'd a deal rather row down the other way toward the bay, mornings, and go a-fishing."

"Oh, had you," said Jocelyn, dryly. Joe looked up at her—he had thrown himself on the bank beside her—and met a close, meaning look, under which he began to redden and fidget in spite of himself.

"Joe!" his sister suddenly exclaimed. "What is this?" and she held out to him a small white packet which she had been keeping in her hand. The boy took it with some surprise, and opened the little twist of paper. His look fell, and the color deepened in his face. But he put a bold face on it.

"A couple of cigarettes," he said in a sulky tone. "I reckon you knew without asking."

"Yes, I knew," said Jocelyn gravely; "I knew, of course, what they were when I found them on the bureau behind the glass in your room the other day when I was helping Mahaly put it in order. "And Joe, how do you suppose I felt when I saw them?"

"I don't see anything to feel so dreadful bad about," answered the boy, keeping his shame-dyed face averted. "All the other fellows do it as well as me."



"Not all, I trust," rejoined his sister. "Such mere boys as you! Why, it is terrible, only to think of it! And those that do it as you do, on the sly, Joe, secretly, knowing that their parents would disapprove of it, carrying about a constant deception with them. No—don't answer me angrily, Joe. You know I am speaking truth; and O Joe, did I ever think *you*—whom we all believed to be manly and honest, no matter what your faults were, could get your own consent to do things *on the sly*—to live in a habit of deceit. Mother's boy, Joe—her only boy!"

Jocelyn's eyes suddenly became full of tears, and her voice faltered, as it came over her how that dear heart would have suffered in the knowledge. Joe felt a twinge of shame and compunction, but he was not prepared to condemn himself wholly.

"For pity's sake, don't get to crying," he said, willing to turn the subject into another channel. "A fellow can stand anything better'n to see a girl cry. And I don't know what you're making such a fuss about. Of course I can't smoke round the house; father would make such a row. But just because he don't happen to care about smoking himself, he mustn't forget, and you mustn't either, that almost every other man does!"



“It would be a great deal better for them if they didn’t!” rejoined his sister with spirit. “Only think of the quantities of money that are just thrown away, consumed in smoke, and horrid-smelling smoke, too, by men who couldn’t think they could afford to buy a new book or picture, or pretty bit of furnishing for their house, or give their family a treat to a concert, or a drive, or a little trip in the summer. I declare it seems to me actually wicked, a positive sin, for a man who doesn’t even own the house he has brought his wife to, who knows that he has made no provision for her or his children, in case of his death, to go on, day after day, puffing away, burning up the very bank-bills that would help to buy a home for them and the means to keep it up. And it is that sort, just as well as those who really can afford to indulge themselves, who spend just as much on tobacco. It’s a man’s privilege, forsooth, a man’s comfort; it rests him after his day’s work, makes him sleep well! But what rests a woman after her day’s work, which is often just as hard and trying as a man’s? I wonder if it wouldn’t soothe her, and help her to sleep peacefully, if she had a mind at rest about the future, if she knew her husband cared as much about her pleasure, as about his own selfish enjoyment?”



Joe glanced up at his sister as she paused in her excited speech, with a furtive twinkle in his eye. He had never heard her "free her mind" in this way before.

"Now Jocelyn," he said, half-teasingly, half-coaxingly, "It isn't like you to be so hard on a fellow. You know if you were to see father, or somebody else you like, sitting before the fire, or out on the porch of an evening, resting, and just longing for a pipe or a cigar to make him perfectly happy, you know you wouldn't have the heart to refuse him, now would you?"

The young girl flushed up and gave a little reluctant laugh.

"No, I suppose not," she admitted. "I'm a woman, and I suppose I should do as the rest—let them be comfortable in their own beloved way. But I'm sure I should never think it a wise or sensible way, even for those who could perfectly well afford it, or a wholesome thing to keep one's head in a bath of nicotine so much of the time. For the worst of it is men who smoke are like men who drink, very few of them, have any moderation. They begin when they are mere lads, just as you have done, you naughty fellow! and the habit grows with their growth, and strengthens with their strength, until at length, it becomes their master, and they can't get from under its power.



Many a man who would be scornfully indignant if he was called a slave, *is* a slave, and tobacco is his master!"

Joe gave a little low whistle under his breath, but Jocelyn turned upon him with emphasis.

"No, you needn't whistle, Joe," she said. "You know well that I am speaking the truth, or you will know it some day, if you keep on. But you know you are *not* to keep on, Joe—not at this age. If you choose to smoke when you are a man, why, I suppose your women-kind will have to submit to it as amiably as they may. Only I hope you'll be man enough not to indulge yourself at the sacrifice of what you owe to them; 'drink fair,' as Betsey Prig said. But just now, master Joe, while you are a mere boy at school, this sort of thing had better stop before it is fairly begun—don't you think so? Come now, look at it for yourself: do you admire the appearance of those youths that stand round the street-corners with the everlasting cigarette in their mouths, looking so pale and flabby and insignificant, their eyes dull, their hands shaky, their whole atmosphere made disgusting by the sickly, unclean smell?"

"Oh come now!" interrupted the boy, reddening. "What's the use o' putting it so strong?"

"Because it is strong itself—bah!" said his



sister, with a look of disgust. "Why Joe, don't you know what those cheap things you and boys like you, can afford to buy, are made of? The sweepings of tobacco-warehouse floors, the stumps of old cigars—tossed into the streets, the scraps and shreds gathered up amid the dust and dirt of the close, filthy dens where the cigarmakers herd together in poor streets and alleys—and you boys put them in your fresh young mouths—oh, the very idea is nauseous! And it doesn't only make your bodies unclean, Joe; it soils your minds, it poisons your souls, it hardens your hearts. Don't, please, think I am exaggerating, Joe. Just think a minute what it has made *you* do; we always found you open and honest about everything before; could trust your word, and rely upon you not to conceal things. But now see; it has made you break your promise to me about coming home, because you wanted to be off with the boys who have put you up to this miserable thing; you played truant from school—yes, father told me, poor father, because he was so distressed about it;—you keep away from home, you avoid being with the rest of us—O Joe, what would mother say?"

"'Twouldn't ever have been so if she was here," said Joe sullenly. "But everything is different now; a fellow don't want to be all the



time just with a lot of girls. She used to make things jolly, and father too. And now he don't care, only to find fault if a fellow breaks loose once in awhile. He keeps to himself, and never thinks—"

"Joe!" interrupted his sister. She had to swallow a pang of mortification to think how little her own efforts seemed to count for thus far; but she got over that in a minute; had she herself ceased to miss the dear mother? "Joe," she said with decision, yet in a voice which showed she understood and sympathized; "You must remember that it isn't only you who feel the difference; but what if we all took it into our heads to 'break loose,' as you call it? 'A fellow' can do his duty whether things are jolly or not; and if not in his own strength, then, when he has been brought up as you have been, Joe, he knows where to seek help. And Joe, you are mistaken about father; he does care very much about everything that concerns us all. What do you suppose he is planning for now?"

"Dunno," said Joe, still sulkily; "and if I'd a-thought you were bringing me here only to preach to me—"

But Jocelyn would not take any notice of this. "Suppose," she went on, "I were to tell you that he was thinking of buying a boat for



us all, but for you, specially; that he was going to teach you how to manage it, and come out on the river with us himself in it?"

This was too much for Joe's assumed indifference. He looked up with his dark eyes sparkling in spite of himself. "Do you mean it?" he said. "You are not one of the chaffing ones, Jocelyn!"

"I do mean it truly, Joe. Father and I talked about it last night, and I knew you'd be glad. But we are to help pay for it ourselves, you know; a nice big boat costs a good deal of money. I promised for us all that we would give up something; you know what it is *you* are to give up, Joe!"

The boy reddened and looked vexed for a moment, then his face cleared, and he broke out, "All right; I'm agreed; I'll put in that part of my allowance. And as long as you feel so bad about it, J. J., I'll own up to you. I don't really care for the nasty things at all, myself. They made me awfully sick ever so many times at first, and I haven't learned to really like 'em yet. It was only the boys guying me for being a Miss Nancy; but I guess they won't Miss Nancy much when they see me handling a boat of my own! Why Jocelyn!" and he got close up to her in his eagerness, and stretched out his arm down stream in the direc-



tion of the bay. "Why, do you know, the river's just chock-*full* of fish nowadays! Why I caught a dozen flounders and conjers myself the other day! Talk about your sunsets and your moonrises; if you want to see something pretty, just get a sight of a great porgy leaping up out of the water in the early morning, and catching the sunrise on his scales, all shining just like silver! And then see him fight for all he's worth, and then hauled in—whew! You needn't make a face; you like him when he's stuffed and baked for dinner as well as the next one. But J. J., I say! do you *truly* mean it? Is father really going to do it, and when?"

"I don't know exactly when," answered Jocelyn. "Soon enough, I think; and I should not wonder," smiling meaningly down into the boy's eager, upturned face; "if it might expedite matters if a certain young scapegrace I know were to go to his father, and say something different from what he probably did last night! O Joe!" and the young girl threw her arms imploringly about her brother's shoulders; "I'm so glad you don't care about those horrid things! So thankful it was put into my heart to have this talk with you right at the first, before the wretched habit had got settled upon you!—Do be good now, Joe; you know you've been a bad fellow about all



this; but do be good now, and let us all be good and happy together again! I'm so glad about the boat; I think it is awful good in father,—and he does care, Joe——”

“He's a brick,” said Joe decisively; “he's a regular brick, that's what he is; and as for you, J. J., you're a brick too! And I mean to deserve it of you both.”

And with this Jocelyn was fain to be content: she knew how much it meant from Joe.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### A LESSON FOR JULIET.

“**I** SEE the old Vaughn house is occupied at last,” said Mr. Jerome one morning at breakfast some weeks later. “I happened to pass that way yesterday for the first time in a great while.”

“Why yes, father,” volunteered Jem promptly. “The people moved in more than a month ago. They’re some relation to the Blands, and their name is Pickett. There’s one of the girls in my class at school, but I don’t like her much.”

“There is one of them in my class too, and I do like her, very much,” supplemented Juliet in her cool inimitable way. “I intend to call upon her soon, and when she has returned the call I should like to invite her to go out with us in the boat some evening.”

For the boat, to the great enjoyment of the whole family, was already an accomplished fact. Mr. Jerome, anxious to try its effect with his son, especially, after a second talk with Jocelyn, had arranged for its purchase at once; but on the principle of lightly won lightly



prized, he permitted the young people to assume a certain share of its cost, and they all felt that the pleasure it brought was well worth the small sacrifice exacted.

It had really worked wonders with Joe already; the sullenness and gloom had been put to flight by this new delightful interest and activity; the boy was his own open jolly self once more, and his father found his own zest in life re-stimulated by the share he took in the lad's untiring pleasure. He found himself getting up, and without reluctance, earlier than he had been in the habit of doing for years, to give Joe lessons in the art of managing his pretty craft; and he felt his pulses thrill, as he scarcely thought they would ever do again, to the old keen excitement of what Joe tersely termed "a bite and a fight."

Many was the spoil of fresh delicious "spot" or mackerel, these two ardent sportsmen brought home for breakfast, to the great satisfaction of Peggy, the cook; and what Jocelyn cared more for, the better treasure of brightened spirits and strengthened health, and best of all a daily increased confidence and affection between father and son.

The girls had their full share of the enjoyment too. Only Jem cared enough for fishing to rise betimes and be off with her father and



Joe: she was a capital little "catch;" had none of her sisters' feminine shrinking from the disagreeable and painful part of the business, and marched home with her small trophies as proudly and triumphantly as Joe himself. But for the others the charm was when the "Jay-bird" spread her white wings and breasted the bright waves at sunset time, or when the moonlight bewitched them so with its glamour as they glided like a dream along the wooded shores, now in light, now in shadow, that they could scarcely bring themselves to leave it.

They had shared their pleasure liberally with their friends, and many was the merry party who had joined them in making the echoes ring with song and with laughter. It but added to their own enjoyment to make others happy—but this new girl, this stranger—were they quite sure about her?

Juliet's remark had not been addressed to any one in particular, and Mr. Jerome glanced questioningly from her toward her older sister.

Jocelyn hesitated a moment; she had met the young lady in question herself, and had not been favorably impressed with her manner. "Let us get acquainted with her first," she said pleasantly. "What is your objection to her sister, Jem? You're rather quick to take up likes and dislikes, aren't you, little girl?"



"Oh, I don't know," said Jem hesitatingly. "She's what I call 'catty,' Fanny Pickett is. She kind o' purrs and paws round you when she wants you to show her how to do her sums, or to trade some part of your lunch that you like for some part of hers that you don't. And then if she happens to hear any of the girls say anything nice about you, she comes and tells you she's got a swap for you, last go; and she wouldn't give it to you, no, not for the world, till you go and try to get somebody to say something nice about her in return."

"Is it English Jem is talking, may I ask," inquired Mr. Jerome dryly; "for really I don't understand—"

"Oh, that's girls' slang, father, for the compliments they go about trading with each other. Big business, isn't it? Of all vain things upon earth, girls are the—"

"Vainest, except boys," interposed Jem, shrewdly. "Don't I remember how a certain youth I know colored up and beamed the other evening when somebody told him how manly he looked in his blue sailor rig?" Joe reddened again furiously through all his freckles, and in the general laugh at his expense Juliet's proposition received no further thought.

Her purpose was settled however, and that very afternoon, coming into Jocelyn's room on



her return from school, she broached the subject again.

"I think I shall go this afternoon, it is so pleasant, and make that call on Clara Pickett," she said. "They seem to be very nice people; they are only to be here part of the year; they spend the season in Richmond every winter. There is no one just your age, still I don't see why you shouldn't call on the mother: all the best people in town have been, Clara says, and I don't see why we should be behindhand in politeness."

"Nor I," assented her sister pleasantly. "But it isn't possible for me to go to-day, because I have an appointment for Janet with the dentist. The poor child's teeth need a general overhauling."

"Oh! I'm sorry for you both! Well, I think I shall go then; I half promised Clara."

And she did go, and that was the beginning of one of those sudden intimacies, those violent friendships, that are so apt to spring up between girls of their age.

They petitioned Miss Brandon to allow them to occupy the same desk at school; they called for one another in the mornings, and walked home together afternoons; they planned to spend their Saturday afternoons in each other's society, and of an evening Juliet usually man-



aged that her new friend should be one of the boating party. Clara even went so far as to proffer a request that Juliet might be allowed to come and sit with her in church: "There are so many of you, you know, Miss Jerome;" she pleaded to Jocelyn; "but my mother is something of an invalid, and doesn't go to church very regularly, don't care much about these country churches, you know; and neither do I, to tell you the truth, they're so slow, and the music so poor,—but then it is something to do, somewhere to go, of a Sunday! And it would be so much nicer if Juliet could come and sit with me,—can't she, Miss Jerome?"

But Jocelyn met the free, take-it-for-granted smile with a grave look.

"Oh, that isn't our way of feeling about going to church, Miss Clara," she said. "We are all very fond of our dear old-fashioned church, and of everything connected with it. It has seemed like a sort of Sunday home to us ever since we were big enough to toddle up the aisles, and we couldn't think of being scattered about in different places there. It wouldn't seem the same at all, and my father would not like it. He wants all his brood around him, under his own wing."

"Oh!—does he, indeed?" and the young lady opened her black eyes wide in a stare that



might mean a great many things. "Well; I don't wish to intrude myself, of course. I'm only so fond of dear Juliet, here, and indeed, of the Richmond churches. But excuse me,—there I go again!"

"Nonsense," interposed Juliet. "There is no need of excusing yourself. Of course the churches in a fine city must be a great deal nicer than ours every way. I don't wonder ours seem 'slow' to you. I only wish there was any prospect of my ever going to a city myself, for the churches, and for every thing else! I'm getting dreadfully tired of Oakleigh."

Jocelyn cast a quick pained look at her sister. Was one of the jaybirds indeed wearying of the home-nest?

"Oh, don't say that, dear!" she expostulated, but Clara rejoined promptly, "I don't wonder, poor girl! It must be *awful*, except in summer time! And you shall have the prospect, if you want it, and if you are allowed,—" with a meaning emphasis in her tone, and a half-perceptible glance toward Jocelyn. "I can always do as I like, you know; my mamma is a dear; she believes in liberty; and she will be most happy to invite you to visit us in town next winter, if I ask her to. And of course I will ask her, if you'll say you will come."

Juliet's pale, clear-cut face flushed with pleas-



ure at the mere mention of what seemed such a delightful thing. But she turned it off with a laugh: she was a Virginia girl, and could not think of being indebted to a mere stranger for such hospitality.

“Oh, it’s ever so sweet of you Clara, but of course I couldn’t dream of such a thing. Why, I shall be in school still, you know.”

“Oh, well, what of that? You can come for the Christmas holidays, you know, and crib a week before, and a week after. And if that is all the time you can possibly spare, why, we’ll just have to cram it as full of all sorts of jollification as we can; theatres, parties, visits——”

“Oh!” interjected Juliet; “do you want to quite turn my head?” and Jocelyn hastily interposed, trying to speak playfully:

“Yes, Miss Clara, I shall have to beg you not to upset us simple country folk with visions of your gay city life. It isn’t likely ever to come in our way, and you found us very happy and contented without it. Please leave us so!”

“Oh!” with a half-mocking assumption of deference, “I wouldn’t presume to think of you in the matter, Miss Jerome! But Juliet,—are you very contented with Oakleigh, dear? No, you are fitted to shine in brighter scenes, and we shall have to try to give you the opportu-



nity one of these days! But just now," as she rose to go, "I must be leaving; I have made an unconscionable call already. Can't you walk part of the way home with me, dear? It is an hour yet till dinner."

"I haven't practiced my music yet to-day," hesitated Juliet.

"And you know you want to have your sonata quite perfect for the church concert next week," suggested Jocelyn gently.

"Oh, can't you make it up some other time?" urged Clara, determined to carry her point. "There is something particular I want to speak to you about."

"Well; I suppose I can get up an hour earlier to-morrow morning," half assented Juliet.

"And father's morning nap!" Jocelyn reminded her in a low, wondering tone.

"Oh, well, I'll make it up to-morrow afternoon then!" said Juliet sharply, seeing the mocking light in the big black eyes that were watching her. "I don't feel like practicing now; and when I don't feel like it I never accomplish anything. I'll have the sonata all right, but now I want some fresh air. Come on, Clara, if you really must go."

"Oh, indeed I must! What a dear you are to come with me! I hate to walk alone. Good evening, Miss Jerome. Do come soon



and see mamma again; she enjoyed your last call so much!" and then, as Jocelyn, bowing with grave politeness, disappeared within the door, to which, in Virginia fashion, she had accompanied the visitor—

"Which is more, I am afraid, than Miss Jocelyn could say of my call, though I paid it on my mother's behalf to her. I'm afraid your gracious sister doesn't approve of your humble servant, Juliet. Or, is her manner like that to all your friends, poor girl?"

"Oh nonsense," said Juliet hastily. "Why should you imagine Jocelyn doesn't approve of you? Don't take up notions, Clara." She colored in spite of herself, and Clara, after a quick glance at the delicate flushed face, burst into a rallying laugh.

"Aha!" she exclaimed. "Your cheeks betray you, my dear. You know she doesn't like me; but you needn't mind. I shan't let it keep me awake nights as long as she doesn't come between you and me, dearie. I saw I had put my foot into it when I ventured to characterize the church as 'slow.' But it is slow, mortally slow, Juliet, my love! The walls are bare, the organ is wheezy, and the minister—oh, what long dull sermons he preaches! But then, don't you go to being vexed too—I think church is slow anyhow, and sermons always



tiresome. I suppose I'm a very naughty girl, but I really am afraid I don't care for anything much that doesn't amuse me!"

"Oh, but one doesn't expect to be amused at church, Clara!" expostulated Juliet, feeling that her friend was going rather too far for her.

"Don't we, then? Indeed I expect to be amused anywhere and everywhere if I only can! And once in a while something does happen that is very entertaining even in church. I want to tell you about a little affair that I witnessed with my own eyes two or three Sundays before I left Richmond. It was a regular little act in a drama, just like a bit of side-play on the stage. But I forget—you don't know anything about a drama, or the stage, you dear little innocent! Well, we'll change all that one of these days! Miss Jocelyn to the contrary notwithstanding. You were never born to vegetate in Oakleigh all your days! Here, tuck your arm in mine, and don't walk so fast. There's plenty of time.

"Well: it happened to be what they call Foreign Mission Sunday; there had been a great appeal made to the congregation, and a big collection was expected. There are a good many rich men in our church, and one of the richest sits just in front of us. Mamma always would have her pew in good position of course. One



of the deacons was sick that day, and they had asked this gentleman to join the others in passing the plates. Well, just before he left his pew, he took out his pocket-book—such a big fat wallet, full of bank notes! and took out two bills, one a twenty, and the other a ten—I could see them just as plain! The twenty he put in his vest-pocket for his own contribution, of course, and the other he handed to his daughter who sat beside him.”

“Well!” interjaculated Juliet, who was listening with interest.

“Yes, well, it was very plain that the young lady thought one such sum was enough for just a church collection; I suppose she knew her father made regular subscriptions besides; but anyhow, such a look came over her face as she saw the big white “10” on the back of the note! She’s a perfect beauty, you know, and a great belle; and though I’m not acquainted with her myself, I know from others that she was engaged to the gentleman who sat in the pew with her; such a handsome fellow, Juliet! such an elegant-looking pair!—Well, she turned toward him now, I could see her face, and it was just sparkling and brimming over with mischief.

“Why? where was there any fun in such a thing?”



“Well, wait till I tell you. It was the very cutest thing I ever saw in my life! She held the note in the hollow of her hand and motioned him to notice the size of it. He gave a little bit of a start; he couldn't afford any such contribution as that, for handsome as he is, an old family, and all that, he's only a young lawyer, just getting settled in his practice. She nodded as much as to say, ‘Yes! did you ever?’ and then with just the prettiest smiling pout, she nodded again, as much as to say, ‘But I'm not such a goose!’ deliberately folded up the bill, slipped it into her pocket, and then held out that saucy little hand again, and whispered something to him with her face all over mischief and smiles.” Juliet stared, speechless, at her companion, but Clara did not observe it, and went on gayly and laughingly, as though even the recollection were irresistibly amusing to her.

“Well, her young gentleman laughed back at her, but shook his head, and didn't seem to believe she meant it. She did though, and she whispered to him again in a very coaxing way. He smiled still, but still shook his head, and by this time the old gentleman was coming toward the pew with the plate. So she whispered again, and this time she was in such a hurry that I heard quite plainly what she said;



‘It’s only a joke ; of course I’ll make it all right with him. Lend me a dollar bill, or the smallest one you’ve got, quick ! You wouldn’t refuse to lend me money, when I ask it of you, would you ?’ And he just had time to pull out a note and give it to her before her father was there. It was all folded up, and he didn’t notice what change had been made at all ; he just walked straight on, and she—she just shook with silent laughter, and the color, oh, so lovely ! just like a damask rose, came all over her face, and away round her neck and ears—I never saw anything so pretty in my life ! I watched him to see what he would do ; he looked at her as if he was awfully puzzled, and yet as if he couldn’t help thinking she was the sweetest thing ! ‘It is really a joke ; you’ll make it all right, of course !’ he whispered, and she just flashed a smile at him, and nodded her head, and then straightened out her face, for other people besides me were beginning to notice them. But I just know she was thinking in her heart that she might as well have that big bill as for it to go to convert some horrid old South Sea cannibal, and I don’t believe she ever told her father one single word about it. But wasn’t it droll ? and hadn’t she pluck ?—I don’t seem to have made you see, though, how funny it was !”



"Funny!" Clara started at the outburst of indignant disgust in her companion's tone. "You call that funny? Well I call it anything else; I call it the worst possible taste if it was a joke, and if as I believe with you no joke was intended,—for where was the point of it? I call it simply shocking; dishonest, actual thieving, and the very worst thieving that can be done, from God himself, in his own house!"

The young girl stole a hasty glance of alarm toward her friend's face. It was all in a glow of honest anger, and the finely cut features were set with a look of contempt that boded ill, she feared, for herself. Clara Pickett was comparatively a stranger in Oakleigh, and not a girl to make herself readily popular. She had selected Juliet Jerome among all the young people of her own age she had met to adopt as her "particular friend." "She is the prettiest and most stylish-looking girl in school," she had said to herself, "and that pure, pale complexion of hers is just the right foil for my black eyes and red cheeks. Good family, too; nice old house, and no mother to be meddling, and forbidding this or that. Guess she'll suit me best of 'em all; got to have somebody, as long as we're obliged to come down to this dead-and-alive old foggy place for economy's sake."



She had accordingly addressed herself from the first to the winning over of the tall, lady-like girl, who was always well-dressed and well-mannered; and whose general air of rather cool and proud reserve made her conquest all the more of a triumph. And Juliet, single-minded, and inexperienced in the ways of the world, and glad to be lifted a little out of the soberness which still veiled her own home-life, was fascinated by the girl's gay rattling manner, her stories of city life, her lively talk about all manner of things. She was beguiled also by her professions of affection toward herself, and the flattery which she knew how skilfully to administer; and so found herself gradually, and half-reluctantly, in the position of companion, and confidante-in-chief to the new arrival.

Half-reluctantly, because, much as she enjoyed her new friend's high spirits and witty speech, there had more than once been things said in the course of the rattling talk which had offended Juliet's refined taste, or perhaps jarred upon her delicacy or her high-mindedness: but Clara was always so quick to detect it when she made a mistake, and so cunning in repairing it, that she had generally succeeded in effacing the impression, and making Juliet think—"It is only her nonsense; she doesn't really mean



half the things she says." She saw plainly enough that she had gone too far to-day, and felt at once both amazed and alarmed.

"Mercy! the little prig!" she said to herself. "But then, I don't want to give her up, and especially I don't want to give up the boating that makes these dull evenings endurable!—Why certainly, my dear," she made haste to say, cleverly trying to make her retreat. "Of course, I agree with you entirely, that it was just as dishonest as it could be! Though I'd like to see anybody accusing the elegant Miss Delorme of thieving! But it was, of course, just as you say; and all the more shame because she didn't need the money at all. Her father can afford to give her everything she wants, and I guess he does by the way she dresses. But then, that's nothing, you know, my dear! There are always ways of spending money—or of hoarding it; and I've noticed the richer people are, the bigger their own dollars seem to them to be; the more they want to get for them, and the less do they like to part with them. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know, I am sure. I have had very little experience of rich people," answered Juliet in a chill, mental tone. Clara flashed another sidelong glance at the set, cold face, and whistled softly under her breath.



"Well," she resumed, perseveringly, "you keep your eyes open, my dear, and you will find that I am right. The more people have the more they want, and the less they are willing to give away, as a general thing. I suppose that Miss Delorme thought all of a sudden of something pretty that ten dollars would buy, or maybe only that it was a pity to let it go out of the family. I'm not defending her, no indeed! don't think it of me. It wasn't her taking the money that seemed funny to me; it was only her cute way of doing it, all the pretty by-play—but you are not minding what I'm saying, Juliet! What are you stopping there for?"

"I really can't go any farther with you, Clara. I must turn back at once; dinner will be ready."

"Oh! dinner! What do girls care about horrid hot dinners in the summer-time? Come down with me to Naylor's and I'll treat to ice-cream, and then we can take as long a walk as we like. And when you get home, make the cook give you something. Why, I wouldn't be bound down so to hours and rules, if I were you. You are not so much younger than your sister; I should think you might be your own mistress!"

"I am as much so as I wish to be. My



father likes to have us all around him at the table, and we all like to please him."

Juliet's tone was still cool and unbending, and her companion concluded it would be as well to give up the case for to-day. Not without one last attempt, however; and ingeniously turning the sneering laugh that rose to her lips with a little plaintive half-sigh, she said,

"Does he care so much? Ah, you are all dear, model people, entirely too good for poor rattlepate me! But that's why I like to be with you, Juliet; that's why I care more for your company than any other girl's in town: because I think maybe I may grow to be something like you one of these days! Good-bye, dear; I won't keep you another minute against your conscience; but I shall be round for you to-morrow afternoon!"

And Juliet, who a moment before had felt that she did not wish to see her very soon again, mollified by the flattering suggestion, so adroitly put, returned the kiss effusively offered, and walked home, wondering in her own mind if it would be quite right to throw off a girl who evidently had had so little good influence brought to bear upon her, and to whom she might really hope to be a help.

It was perhaps unfortunate that Jocelyn



should have taken just that evening to say to her, pausing on the landing as they were going up to bed,

“Juliet, do you care so very much about that new acquaintance of yours, Clara Pickett? Don’t be vexed if I say I don’t quite like your intimacy with her. I don’t like her manners, or her way of talking.”

“Because you set out with a prejudice against her, Jocelyn. But I suppose city people, used to a great deal of going out, and all that sort of thing, are never so prim and particular as we are with our old-fashioned company-manners. And as for her talk, I know she rattles on a good deal of nonsense, but I believe she really wants to improve, and I think maybe I can help her.”

“I’m afraid she will be more likely to harm you,” urged Jocelyn, with loving insistence. “I don’t think I am prejudiced against her, but I have an intuitive feeling.”

“Only another name for prejudice very often, I think,” rejoined Juliet, coldly. “I am much obliged to you, Jocelyn, of course; but I am not a baby any longer, and I really think I may be trusted to take care of myself in this matter. Good-night.” And she turned and went on up to her own bed-chamber.

Her sister went into her room, the dear fam-



ily room that had been her mother's, with a look of trouble and perplexity upon her sweet grave face.

"I don't seem to get on with Juliet at all," she was thinking sadly to herself. "What do I do to make her hold herself so *aloof*? And what can I do to bring her nearer to me? Sisters, so near of an age, we ought to be such friends! And instead, that strange girl, whom I don't trust."

She lay awake a long time pondering the matter; and found relief at last only in taking her trouble to her Best Friend, entreating his help and guidance, and leaving it humbly to his own time and way.

In the meantime, Clara, chuckling inwardly over her own cleverness in managing, continued to come back and forth to the Jaybirds' Nest as freely as ever, and much more freely than Juliet went to her. Clara rather preferred that this should be so; time hung very heavy on her idle hands these long summer days, and it gave her something to do, the dressing after her midday nap, and loitering up the broad, shady street toward her friend's house; displaying her charming toilets to any chance observers, dropping in at the shops, turning over their simple wares, and exchanging chit-chat with the youths who stood behind the



counters, and who were only too glad to while away their none too busy hours, bartering small-talk with so attractive and so facile a customer.

"Why, isn't it just jolly," she exclaimed one day, when she had been up to get Juliet to go with her on some trifling shopping expedition. "Of course, in the city, it would never do to acknowledge an acquaintance with a mere dry-goods clerk."

"Why not? If he was all right in other respects?" inquired Juliet in her straightforward way. Clara gave her a queer look.

"Oh, you dear unsophisticated thing, you! Because it wouldn't!—But here, why I hear some of the best old names in the state among the clerks; so little else for them to do down here I suppose, and impecunious enough, of course. But never mind, they come from gentlemen's families, and I don't see any harm, do you, in passing away some of the dull moments in a little talk and laugh like them. I think we had a real jolly time with those young fellows in at Bolton's, and oh, what a 'swap' that handsome young Pryor gave me for somebody! I guess we'll have to do as they begged us—call again. Only fancy their actually making iced lemonade for us right there in the store! Imagine such a thing in Richmond! But don't



you wish I'd tell you what a beautiful compliment you had!"

The color came into Juliet's clear cheek, but not all together from the cause her companion would have attributed it to. She felt a little annoyed with herself for having been beguiled into spending nearly an hour making-believe to look over a stock of ribbons and embroideries that could easily have been exhausted in ten minutes, but in reality, "visiting" with these youths. She knew she could never have consented to do it if one of them had not been a sort of distant cousin, a relationship acknowledged in Virginia to the fifth or sixth degree—but even so, she did not feel satisfied with herself, and there was something—more than the slang—which jarred upon her in Clara's speech. She answered with some sharpness; "Indeed, you must count me out, please, in any such plan. It isn't my way to be calling upon the clerks in the stores, and I'm afraid that's about what we've been doing this afternoon. Hereafter, if they want to see me, they must do it at my father's house. The Pryors would be welcome there, of course; our great-great grandfathers were cousins, and came over from England together."

Clara gave her companion one of her quick side-glances, and bit her lip to conceal the



amusement she felt at this statement, made in all simplicity and dignity.

“Yes, but you know dear,” she said, “how much courage it takes for a smitten youth to make a formal call upon his charmer, and be received, as likely as not, by her solemn papa, or her stately grown-up sister. You won’t be so primmy, I know, or so cruel; and there isn’t one thing out of the way in a little friendly chat and nonsense over our shopping, and when I see you to-morrow you’ll agree with me I’m quite sure. Good-bye!”

Juliet did not see her on the morrow, however. She could not feel quite reconciled to her own share in yesterday’s performance, and she felt instinctively that she would not like either her father or Jocelyn to know of her lingering to talk and laugh with the young clerks in the shop, and of her accepting a hospitality which was rather a presumption, though meant doubtless, in all good-natured courtesy, in them to offer. She began to feel conscious of a certain doubt as to whether Jocelyn were not right in thinking that Clara was more likely to harm her than she to help Clara. Certainly she had not perceived any evidence as yet of any influence for good she possessed for her new friend; while she scarcely ever spent an hour with her without having something to remem-



ber which was not exactly agreeable; such a feeling mentally, as is physically expressed by "a bad taste in the mouth." She was afraid Clara was what is called "fast"; she saw that she was free in her manner, and flippant in her talk; she did not like it, and she began to feel less and less confidence in her power to effect any real or lasting change in her.

"But, poor girl," she said to herself; "there is this excuse to be made for her; she evidently has never had any proper bringing up at home; her mother is a shallow, rather vulgar, fashionable woman; she either doesn't see Clara's faults, or won't take the trouble to correct them. I don't quite like to give her up; she can't do anything so *very* much out of the way when she is with me; and if I throw her over, I don't know what she might be up to. I shall have to be more careful, that's all, and maybe I can be of some help to her yet. And there's no denying it, when she isn't too coarse, she's capital good company. All the rest of the girls seem dull beside her!"

And so, controlled by these double influences, Juliet yielded again to Clara's persistent seeking, and though she went less and less frequently to visit her, she continued to welcome her in much the old way at the Nest; and as the long summer days rolled leisurely by there were few



on which they did not see each other. Jocelyn did not interfere again: she saw very little of them when they were together, for they were either "cosying" up in Juliet's room, or out in the hammocks on the cedared lawn. And as no special harm seemed to have accrued thus far from the intimacy, undesirable as she still felt it to be, and as she had great confidence in Juliet's own sense of what was right and proper, she was fain to let the friendship run its own race.

It was with some difficulty however, that she refrained from putting in a demurrer one evening when she chanced to hear her father's consent being coaxed from him by Clara to a plan of which she felt a sudden intuitive distrust. She was sitting by her bedroom window with little Jessie on her lap, telling her the twilight story which always sent her good-naturedly to bed. She had just finished, for the hundredth time, perhaps, the wonderful tale of the two lambs, "Peace and Inexperience," and Jessie was leaning back against her breast, in her little white night-gown, pondering over the touching little allegory, which had ever a new and thrilling interest for her; and in the silence of the hour, Jocelyn distinctly heard the high, rather shrill tones of Clara's voice making its appeal to her father out on the piazza below.



"It's a Sunday-school picnic, you know, Mr. Jerome," she was saying; "not from our church, I know, but one that lots of the nicest people belong to. The Ritchies and Carrs—you know them well enough! Well, they are all going, and they wanted me to come and be sure to bring 'that sweet Juliet' with me. It's going to be just splendid, the boat is such a nice, big, safe one, the Pocahontas, you know, and we are going away up the river, a great deal farther than we have ever been before, where the scenery is really beautiful, they say, the banks regular bluffs, high and rocky, and the woods, well! just grand. And mamma is going with us as chaperone, of course, and we can keep to ourselves, our own party, and be just as select and exclusive as you can possibly wish; and you will let Juliet go, won't you, Mr. Jerome? But then I know you couldn't be so cruel as to refuse!"

Jocelyn listened anxiously, but her father seemed to be considering for a moment. Presently he said hesitatingly, "Well, I scarcely know, Miss Clara. I think we had better see what Jocelyn says."

But Clara's voice was heard again, protesting. "Now, what for, Mr. Jerome? Just as if your judgment wasn't equal to the occasion! Why Miss Jocelyn isn't so very much older



than Juliet herself, and anyhow, I can't imagine why she should want to stand in the way of a little pleasure for her. Come now, just decide it yourself, won't you, please! It's such a simple thing; we shall be home by sunset, and mamma will be there. Come now, do say yes, won't you?"

Another hesitating pause, and then,

"What do you think about it yourself, Juliet? You have never been away anywhere before without any of the others."

"Just as you think best, father, of course. But I don't quite see how that sort of thing can be helped now. Jocelyn is so grown-up, you know, and the others such children."

"And you want to go, I see that," said her father, kindly. "Well, I don't like to refuse you, or you either, Miss Clara, and I don't know any particular reason why I should. The boat is safe, I know; I know the superintendent of the Sunday-school too, Mr. Pitt, and that he is a thoroughly reliable gentleman; and as Mrs. Pickett is going as chaperone, and others of our friends are to be there, why, I guess I'll have to do as I'm bid and say yes."

"There! I knew you would!" Jocelyn heard Clara exclaim exultantly. "Juliet, do you know you have got the nicest father in the world—my own, of course, always excepted!"



And just then, little Jessie lifted her head, gave a drowsy little yawn, said sleepily, "I'm so glad, Dottelyn, that old lion didn't get poor little Inespeyence after all! And now I want to go to bed,"—and Jocelyn saw that the affair was settled, without reference to her; and in spite of a reluctance which she instinctively felt, she decided not to suggest any objections, lest Juliet should feel that it was always her inclination to play the part of croaker.

"I'll get father to go down and see her safely off," she said to herself, "and I don't suppose any harm can really come of it. If only mother—"

But unfortunately, when the morning of the excursion arrived, fresh and beautiful, Mr. Jerome found himself in no condition to be up and about. Sitting out too late in the damp evening air had brought on an attack from the "dearest foe" of that low lying region, ague and fever. He had passed a very uncomfortable night, and Jocelyn found herself fully occupied after breakfast in the needful attendance upon him. She went to the door however to see her sister off, and ventured a tiny suggestion of warning:

"We don't know the Picketts, very well, dear, and we shall trust more to your own chaperonage of yourself than to theirs, maybe. Have a real good time, but be careful!"



And Juliet nodded and said she would, and hurried off in the best of spirits,—nobody ever felt anxious about chills and fever—to meet her friend, according to agreement, at her own house. She found a big old-fashioned, carry-all drawn up in front of the door. It was already pretty well filled with people, laughing and chattering gaily together, and Clara herself was running down the steps, looking very chic in a white piqué frock with the jauntiest of scarlet jackets, and her black eyes dancing with excitement.

“Oh, there you are,” she cried, as she espied Juliet: “come, scramble in this very minute, my love; we’re late as it is. Go ahead, driver, we’re all here—baskets and all!” and the man cracked his whip, and away they went, rattling down the crooked old street that led to the little steamboat wharf.

“Why, where is your mother?” Juliet asked, as soon as she had got wedged into a seat, and could look about her and see who were the occupants of the wagon. But Clara contrived to evade answering; she assumed to be in great concern as to the whereabouts of a certain box containing breakables, and in the midst of her fussy search, and the laughing protests of the others who declared it was impossible to move an inch to the right or to the left, and the



merry calls of greeting to other vehicles loaded with gay groups on the same pleasure bent, the short trip down to the dock was accomplished, a loud cheer was set up at sight of the steamboat, all fluttering with Jennons and streamers, waiting their arrival, and Juliet found herself pushed along with the hurrying crowd, on board, and fairly launched out in mid-stream before she had an opportunity to ask again, this time rather wonderingly,

“Why where is Mrs. Pickett, Clara? I don't see her anywhere.”

Clara cast a glance, half appealing, half defiant, at her friend.

“Now don't go and be pudgicky about it, Juliet,” she said, “and especially with me, for it's none of my fault, and I couldn't help it. Mamma said she had one of her bad sick-headaches this morning, and she couldn't possibly be out in the sun on the water.”

“And she isn't here—she isn't coming!” exclaimed Juliet, startled and incredulous.

“No, she really is not; but what earthly difference does it make? The boat is full of people—old, as well as young. How much taking care of do you want, Miss Baby?”

Juliet turned fairly pale with the sudden rush of anger and distress. What would her father, what would Jocelyn say? What au-



dacity in this girl to dare to deceive her thus! And how utterly helpless she was; how powerless to change the state of things!

“But it does make a difference!” she broke out in a passion of indignation. “And you knew it would make a difference, Clara, and that is why you wouldn’t answer me about your mother till you got me on board. It is just a shameful piece of deception: you knew I would take it for granted she had gone on before: and now here we are, away out in the middle of the stream, and what am I going to do?”

“Going to do? Why just be a sensible girl, and have a good time like the rest of us! And don’t use such terms, please, Juliet, about a little innocent ruse practiced for your own sake! I must say, I’m surprised at you! I think instead of getting into a tantrum you ought to feel very much obliged to me for managing so that you should get your trip after all. I couldn’t help my mother’s having a headache; I think myself, she could have come if she had had a mind to: but I wasn’t going to give up my fun because of that, and she never thought of requiring it. But I knew well enough that very particular sister of yours would insist upon your staying at home if she knew mamma was not going, and I cared



enough for you to take the risk of making you angry for a minute rather than to have you lose the pleasure. But I tell you frankly I want you to get over it now, and not spoil everything for us both." Juliet made no answer; she felt it safest not to speak yet.

"Now just think," Clara went on; "how you would have felt, poking back home alone, while all the rest of us went off with colors flying. How pleased your sister would have been; how the youngsters would have bothered you with exclaiming and asking questions; how Joe would have poked fun, boy-like! I wanted to save you from all that, and give you a good time; and I think you ought to be pleased instead of mad with me. Come now," changing her tone of protest to one of coaxing, "be good, Juliet; be your own dear nice self, and you'll see everything goes on just as well as can be. There's no need of special chaperons on a Sunday-school picnic; the teachers are here, and the superintendent, and what more can be needed? Come, straighten out your face, do; here come two of the boys; they are looking for us, I know; and one of them is your particular admirer; but he won't have the courage to speak to you if you set your lips like that!"

Juliet still answered nothing: she desired



earnestly to quit Clara at once, and she cast an almost desperate glance around the boat to see if she could discover any group whom she knew well enough to join; but in all the gay crowd her look fell upon no desirable party with whom she felt sufficiently intimate to impose herself upon them uninvited. There was no sign of either the Ritchie family, or the Carrs; very possibly, she thought with a contemptuous curl of her lip, there had been a 'ruse' about their coming also, and they were not here at all! Meanwhile, young Pryor was unmistakably here, and making his way as rapidly as he could, in and out, among the crowded seats, towards the nook in which Clara had ensconced herself and her companion: and Juliet, in the stress of her annoyance at finding herself virtually alone for a whole long day in the midst of a strange throng, was suddenly conscious of a sort of relief in the thought, "at least, he is kin, even if it is ever so far off!" and received him with more of a welcome than he had ventured to anticipate.

His comrade, a young assistant in lawyer Quimby's office, was evidently expected by Clara, as was shown by the quick interchange of conscious glances, and he promptly took possession of a camp-stool which she had dexterously continued to keep hidden by her draperies:



while Douglas Pryor proceeded to make himself as comfortable as might be on a pile of life-preservers that lay conveniently near, and looking up with his brown eyes sparkling, freely expressed his satisfaction in the existing arrangement of things.

"This is what I call pleasant," he said. "Miss Clara told me she was going to-day to try to persuade you to come, Miss Juliet, but I wasn't quite sure whether she had succeeded or not. I certainly feel indebted to her, for my part. And I hope you'll enjoy it too: I think we are going to have a glorious day."

He was a frank, pleasant-faced young fellow, bright and yet modest withal; full of quiet fun, and with an abundant fund of easy small-talk; and Juliet, finding a certain support in the recollection of that cousinship of their mutual great-great-great grandfathers, permitted herself to take the comfort of the present relief from Clara's society, and by and by, to be entertained, and to make herself entertaining in return. They discovered before long that there were a great many points of similarity in their tastes, and their manner of looking at things; they liked much the same sort of books and people, and gravely agreed that they were "fond of the water," preferred tennis to croquet, thought "Old



Madrid" the sweetest song in the world, and "detested flirtation."

"Wherein we differ from our friends here," said Douglas, with a laughing glance over toward Clara and young Carter, who were evidently devotees of the art, and well-matched in all its mysteries.

There was one special bond of sympathy between our two young people; they had both lost their best and best-beloved friend; and Juliet felt herself deeply touched by the tender way in which her new friend spoke of his dead mother; and how, after she had left them, he couldn't bear to stay at home, and had begged his father to let him leave the old farm up the river, and come down to Oakleigh and go into business.

"My brother Bob is the farmer," he said, in his frank, modest way, taking it for granted that his companion would be good-naturedly interested in his affairs: "he likes it, and will stay there always with my father. But I, I always had a fancy I would like to be one of those great merchants, don't you know, who have their ships coming and going in all parts of the world, and 'do business in great waters': and who knows," laughing, and yet quite in earnest, "if the new South goes on as she has begun, what may happen within the next dozen years



or so? Oakleigh may be a port of entry, and my little investment—I put a little money my mother left me into the store, so that I have a small interest, something more than a mere clerkship—my little investment may swell to a great fortune, and I may be a merchant-prince yet, don't you see, Miss Juliet?"

And then they both laughed, and Juliet said, "Poor little Oakleigh! she was afraid it would be a long time first!" and then confessed her own desire to escape from its narrow confines, and try her powers in some wider sphere. "She didn't want to grow up to be just the regulation young lady," she confided to him; "and settle down into the ordinary domestic woman. She had all sorts of ambitions, she averred, she scarcely knew what, to be a woman-doctor, or lawyer, or inventor, or something; a doctor she believed she preferred; it was such a grand vocation—a healer of bodies—next to that of the minister, who is a healer of souls; but that she was sure she would never be good enough for. No, a doctor would do; how would it sound—Dr. Juliet Jerome—"

And then they both laughed again, but the young man saw that his fair young companion was more than half in earnest, and set himself wholly to disabuse her mind of any such predilection, and convince her that there is no



vocation on earth so high and so happy for woman as just the old sweet accustomed one, of household fairy, genius of the home, bright guardian spirit of the fireside.

There is a great deal usually, to be said on both sides of this momentous question, and the young people found that it took some time to present to each other their various arguments pro and con. They drifted from this into other talk, now grave, now gay, or fell into pleasant silences, when they sat quietly looking out at the swift flowing water, or the high wooded banks; or idly watching the changing groups around them, and listening to the snatches of talk and song and laughter with which the whole boat was alive.

Juliet was glad however, when a little after they found themselves approaching the little riverside landing, from which a path wound up the steep rocky bank, higher and higher, until it presently reached a broad, open, grassy plateau, dotted thickly with great shady pines and chestnuts. It was an ideal spot for a picnic, so high and breezy; and there was the brightest of hillside brooks dancing down from the rocks above, foaming and laughing along its stony bed, and dashing over the bluff in the fairest of waterfalls. Juliet thought it a great deal pleasanter place than the bayside resort to



which her own Sunday-school had been in the habit of going; but the thought that was most agreeable to her, as she saw the gay groups winding, full of laugh and chatter, up the steep path, was that now she would be able to find some other acquaintances, and break up the *tête-à-tête* which her good taste told her had already lasted more than long enough.

She contrived to get a word in private with Clara.

"Do let us join some nice party," she said, "if there is any you know well enough. I don't like for us two girls to be so much alone with just those boys. People will be noticing and saying things."

"Well, let 'em!" rejoined Clara, with a loud laugh and shrug of her shoulders. "It will only be because they are jealous and envious; they're the two nicest fellows on the whole ground, and I don't mean to give mine up, I promise you. I don't mind spiteful tongues; I just enjoy making people envy me!"

Juliet winced, almost as if she had had a blow. Surely Clara had never shown herself so coarse before, or she must have noticed it, and given her up in disgust! She stood silent, with such an expression upon her face that Clara, who did not wish to lose her altogether, thought it best to compromise.



"I think it would be a great deal better fun, myself, if we just kept to ourselves, our own quartette; but of course, I'd rather please you than myself, Juliet, since you came at my invitation. So, if you really want to, we'll go over and ask the Carrs—I see they're setting themselves under that big oak for their luncheon—if they have any objection to our joining them. I guess not however; they haven't got a man with them, except that stupid-looking son and heir of theirs; Fan and Jennie will be glad enough to have our beaux, whether they want us or not. So come along; come, young gentlemen!"

She spoke freely and laughingly, as though she were using only the coin current among young people generally, but it all sounded strange and unpleasant to her companion, naturally a high-minded and dignified girl, and reared so carefully in the simplicity and seclusion of the Nest; and Juliet was thankful when the proposition was made and graciously acceded to, and she could once more have the pleasant consciousness of feeling "proper and protected," while helping good, fussy Mrs. Carr to unload her huge hamper of provisions, and set out her own contribution to the feast. She was not accustomed to what Clara called "going it alone," and she did not feel comforta-



ble under the sensation, and was entirely willing to relinquish the attentions of her young cavalier to be divided between the Misses Fanny and Jennie, and sit quietly under their mother's ample wing, during the discussion of the viands, and through the addresses and singing that followed the general repast.

Not so Clara. She was by nature of an excitable temperament, apt to become loud on occasions of hilarity, and make herself conspicuous in company. She leaned back now in a careless attitude against the trunk of the great shady oak-tree, taking in everything that passed with her big black eyes, and ridiculing whatever she could find to "poke fun" at. This one's hat, the other's gown; the way that one talked or walked, all was grist to her mill. When good Mr. Pitt, the superintendent, rose in the midst of the various groups and began to deliver his little rather halting address, she kept up a running fire of asides which though they were not marked by any special wit, made the others laugh in spite of themselves, and her special attendant, young Carter, to beam upon her with admiration. She began to feel herself quite the life of the party, and to "carry on so," in her elation of spirits, that Juliet, whose finer sense saw that the others were more amused than approving, wondered



uneasily what she would do and say next, and tried in vain to catch her eye and give her a subduing glance.

Presently, when what she termed the "speechifying" was ended, and people were beginning to gather themselves up from their rather constrained positions upon the grass, one of the young ladies chanced to notice the gay scarlet *bolero* which Clara was wearing, and spoke of it in an aside to her.

"What a very pretty little jacket that is you are wearing, Miss Pickett," she said. "That gypsy red always looks so picturesque among the green trees—" and Clara, beaming, and brimming over with excited spirits, answered with her loud laugh,

"Yes, I think it is rather fetching myself. And, by the way, there's a story about this jacket if you'd like to hear it. It'll shock Juliet here, I know," with a mischievous and defiant glance of her black eyes, "but then it is too good to keep."

"Take care, Clara!" Juliet's own eyes pleaded, but the others gathered round, laughing and curious. "Let's have it, by all means," they said.

"Well," Clara began, throwing her look round upon the waiting faces, "it wasn't anything so wonderful after all, only the bargain



at which I got it! I was in a store one day last winter in Richmond, buying some coarse linen and some embroidery silk for a tray-cloth. It didn't amount in all to a dollar, and the parcel was so small I should have taken it home with me if I hadn't been going to make some calls afterward. Shows how lucky I am that I didn't! When I got home and opened it—it had been sent up already—what do you suppose I found? Not my poor little purchases at all, but this beautiful piece of scarlet cloth—see how fine it is! and all this elegant gold passementerie. Now wasn't that a find worth having?"

"But—but surely you did not keep it just so!" broke in the young lady to whom she had especially been speaking. "Of course you took it back to the store!"

"Of course I did nothing of the kind, else how would I have it on now!" rejoined Clara, with a reckless laugh. "I wasn't such a ninny. I rushed off for a pattern, cut it out myself that very evening, put it together the next day, and wore it over a white silk gown to the german that night. Wasn't that quick work?"

"But Miss Pickett—you can't mean—there must be some mistake—" interposed another of the party with a perplexed and incredulous



look. "Why it wasn't yours—it didn't belong to you!"

"And the clerk who sold it to you would have to suffer," added Mrs. Carr, moving forward and fixing a grave and disapproving eye upon the narrator of this singular story. "The person who had really bought the cloth would come to report the mistake, and he would have to make the loss good. You surely did not permit that, Miss Pickett?"

"That wasn't any of my business," retorted Clara, beginning to be angry at being placed on the defensive. "It was his business to see that parcels were sent to their proper destination, and if he didn't attend to it, it was only right he should suffer. I wasn't going to take the trouble to go trotting down town to carry back other people's parcels and hunt up my own. No indeed, I only hoped whoever got mine would enjoy it as much as I did hers—and that's the end of my story. I'm sorry you don't find it as amusing as I supposed you would!"

If Clara had not been completely "off her head" with the foolish excitability which an occasion of merrymaking always aroused in her, she would scarcely have risked the impression even she might imagine such a recital would make; as it was, when she perceived the looks



that were exchanged, the significant silence which followed her last defiant sally, her hilarity gave place to irritation, and she became insolent at once.

"I never chance a failure twice however," she said, "and I shall make surer of my audience next time. Now I shall have the pleasure of bidding you good afternoon, ladies," and she swept a mocking glance, and a profound curtsy round the group. "I think I shall play 'Excelsior,' and aspire to greater heights than these. Come, Mr. Carter, I challenge you to a climb up those higher rocks: I shan't rest until I've scaled their very top, and can look down on all the world! Come Juliet—unless you had rather stay!" and she was off, tossing back a reckless laugh as she went, and her scarlet jacket making a sort of baleful glow as she darted away through the green gloom of the trees.

Juliet stood as if rooted to the spot where she was standing under the oak. She did not wish to follow Clara; on the contrary she felt as though she never wished to be with her again; and she heartily hoped that some one of the party would give some indication of a desire on their part that she should remain with them. But none of them did anything of the kind. Judging probably, according to the old adage,



"Birds of a feather flock together," and having had but slight previous acquaintance with her, they doubtless considered that Juliet was "not their style," any more than her companion, and made no overtures for her further society.

"There are the Randolph girls; we haven't seen anything of them to-day," said Miss Fanny presently to her sister; "we ought to go and speak to them," and with a civil nod to Juliet they went off across the green sward, smiling to greet their friends. Mrs. Carr busied herself in restoring the plates, cups, and so on, to the huge hamper from which they had been taken.

"Let me help you," offered Juliet, delaying as long as she might. But the answer came rather coolly,

"Thank you, but nobody can ever pack for me but myself;" and Juliet, quivering with such shame and mortification as she had never felt before in all her sheltered young life, turned hopelessly away toward young Pryor, who had been standing near her all this while, awaiting her wishes, and lifted her eyes with a sort of reluctant wistfulness to his face.

"They look like a deer's, that has been wounded," thought the young man, all the chivalry of his nature kindled at the sight of the pale hurt face; and there was even more



than the usual respectful gallantry in his manner to her, as he said smilingly,

“Well, Miss Juliet, shall we try the rôle of ‘Excelsior’ too? I’ve no doubt there’s a beautiful view from the rocks up above, if you don’t mind the climb,—” and Juliet, glad to escape in any way from the chilling atmosphere which she felt around her, turned silently and followed his lead, not knowing what else to do.

Her companion respected her silence, and did not obtrude himself in any way except to offer his hand now and then to help her up a specially steep place in the rocky path; and when they reached the top of the bluff, he remained quiet by her side while she stood, her hands drooping clasped before her, and her glance moving now up, now down the river where it flowed so far below, bright, yet deep, between its darkly wooded banks.

“It is beautiful, isn’t it,” he said presently, “and Miss Juliet, so long as there are such—”

But here he was interrupted by a loud exclamation in Clara’s high shrill voice.

“Aha! so you did prefer my company after all: good girl—sensible folks—to leave those primpy people down there. I’d invite you to share this beautiful grape-vine swing I’ve found, but you see there’s only room for two!”

Juliet glanced reluctantly in the direction of



the voice, and discovered the bright black eyes and red cheeks of her quondam friend peeping through the foliage. She was seated with her escort, young Carter, in a loop of a great hanging vine which depended from a huge outstretching pine bough, swinging idly to and fro, his arms, reaching from side to side, making a sort of chair-back, against which she leaned nonchalantly enough, as she looked out, her face in a glow of mocking mirth.

Juliet could not answer, and Douglas Pryor replied for her, understanding all she was feeling.

"Oh, we couldn't think of robbing you of such a pleasure," he said lightly, and then, unfolding the little shawl he had been carrying on his arm and spreading it on the grass, "You look pale and all tired out, Miss Juliet. Do sit down and rest awhile; the ground is dry and warm, and this old tree the very thing to make you comfortable. Now—is that nice? Because if it is, I think I have a friend with me who will be very pleasant company for us both."

"A friend—company!" repeated Juliet in some bewilderment.

"No less worthy a spirit than Tennyson!" replied the youth oracularly; and then with an ingenuous blush, "Indeed, I hope you don't think it's silly and sentimental to like poetry,



Miss Juliet. I can't help being fond of it myself, and as for Tennyson, why I take him with me pretty much wherever I go." And he drew forth a little well-worn blue and gold volume from his pocket, and held it out, regarding it with a glance almost of affection.

Juliet felt a sensation of relief as well as pleasure.

"Now, at least," she said to herself; "we won't have to depend upon talking, and run the risk of personalities;" and she looked up and said with something of her old brightness,

"What good company you keep! I am very glad you thought to invite him to-day, and that he condescended to come. They say he is of a very shy and solitary habit generally, you know. Pray let's renew our acquaintance with him at once."

"Will you read, or shall I? Would it tire you? And do you like *The Princess*?"

The young fellow's voice was quite eager with pleasure.

"Do you know, I have never read *The Princess* yet," admitted Juliet. "All the lovely short poems, of course, and *The Idyls*; and *In Memoriam*, more than once, this last winter, you know. But *The Princess*—well, it looked a little long, and I have rather been saving it—"

"For just this very occasion!" said Pryor



eagerly. "The time, the place, are just fit. You know the story was told out of doors, on a summer afternoon, when some sort of festival was going on, and a few of the party had strayed away to a quiet spot—"

"Was it?" said Juliet; "well, go on, please, and read it to me at once, while we have time;" and her companion needed no second bidding, but began the "Prologue" at once.

He read well; the noble music of the wonderful words lost none of their melody in his rendering; the high and stirring thoughts woke sympathetic thrills in both sincere young souls. The witchery of the tale cast its spell of enchantment upon them, and moments flew by uncounted and unwatched, as by turns they took the book and read aloud, the one to the other.

They had been interrupted only once. Clara, tiring of the swing after a while, came loitering toward them with her companion, and stood looking and listening for a moment. Then — "Oh, do you like poetry?" she said. "Very sentimental and all that, but awfully tiresome, I think. Don't disturb yourselves; we are going a little farther along the ridge; there's a farm back here a little way, Mr. Carter says, where there are wild blackberries growing in the hedges. We'll be back presently and bring you some if we find any!" And then



they strolled off, and reader and listener went back to their enchantment, and were presently, under its spell, oblivious to time and circumstance.

Meanwhile the afternoon was wearing on, and the hour approaching, all unconsciously to them, when the boat was to arrive again at the little landing below, and take up their freight of tired but happy excursionists for the homeward journey. An early hour had been chosen with regard to the little children of the infant class, as the trip itself required an hour or more; and there was nothing in the aspect of sky or wood or water, at five o'clock of the afternoon to rouse these two spell-bound young people to a consciousness that it was time to leave their heights, and descend to the level of ordinary mortals below.

Relying upon Clara's promise to return to them, they sat quietly on, absorbed in their reading; while Clara herself, failing to find the expected blackberries, had taken a sudden whim to go down to the dock, and try her success with certain small fishing-tackle which young Carter produced from his pocket. There proved to be considerable difficulty in the matter of bait, and the fish, if any there were so near a wharf that was in daily use, declined to be tempted by her inexperienced hands. The



amateur angler suddenly decided to give up her fruitless attempts.

• “My! but fishing is stupid business!” she exclaimed. “Too slow for me, altogether;—It’s a bore sitting so still and keeping so quiet; come, let’s go along the bank a little farther and see if there aren’t any wild flowers; it must be nearly time for asters and gentians, or we might find a pitcher-plant, or a scarlet cardinal—and scarlet is my color, you know!”

Her escort was “agreeable to anything she wished,” and they wandered idly along the wooded shore in the shadow of the high overhanging cliffs. They had not strolled very far however, when in a pause of their laughing chitchat, a certain significant sound made itself suddenly audible, and they exclaimed with one voice—“The boat!”

“She must be rounding up to the dock—she sounds so near,—” said young Carter; “we must hurry back as fast as we can; she doesn’t make very long stops, and there are your friends to be called: likely as not they won’t hear her away up there.”

“I don’t see why not: they’re not babies and they’ve got ears as well as we.”

“Yes, but they were reading, you know, and we promised to go back for them, don’t you remember?”



"Oh well, I can't help it; we haven't got time to go back for them now, I'm sure," said Clara excitedly. "And anyhow I'm sure they must have heard all the bustle of the rest of the people starting. They're probably on the dock by this time—they could see the boat coming from far off. It's ourselves, I'm anxious about now!"

"Oh we have time enough," said her companion, re-assuringly; "and if you wouldn't mind, Miss Clara, if you would let me go on a little ahead—I could run so much faster—I could just scramble up the rocks and shout to your friends——"

But Clara snatched him excitedly by the arm.

"No, no," she protested. "I mustn't be left alone here; I don't see how you can think of it. No escort of mine ever proposed such a thing before!—just see how the people are pouring down! The last ones are almost at the bottom—they must be among them!"

Young Carter sent his keen glance, as he hurried along, up toward the top of the bluff. "No!" he exclaimed suddenly, "They are not! They are up there still, I am sure, Miss Clara! I remember Miss Juliet's hat was hanging on the branch of a tree, and I am almost certain I can see it there now! Do just let me



try and run up a little way where I can make them hear me—”

But Clara clung forcibly to his arm. “No, no! I tell you,” she cried. “Not till you get me safely on board the boat. I don’t believe it is the hat; you couldn’t possibly see it so far up, among so many trees. It’s a piece of paper, or something, that got lodged in the bough. We’ll find them on board—see, there’s the boat fast already, and the people crowding on her! Of course they’re amongst them!”

Philip Carter allowed himself reluctantly to be urged along by his companion; after all, it was this excited girl, clinging nervously to his arm, for whose safety and comfort he had made himself responsible: and she might be right; they might find the rest of their party on board; at any rate, to go and look, seemed the only thing he was to be permitted to do. He hurried Clara along as fast as she could go, sending eager looks meanwhile in every direction in the hope of discovering the objects of his search; and when, as he had feared, no sign of them was apparent anywhere, he placed his charge upon a seat with what she thought resentfully rather scant courtesy, and made a rush, pushing his way, hither and thither among the throng, to try and find the captain of the boat and insist upon his delaying a few



minutes until the missing pair should be made aware of the state of things.

But push and struggle though he did, regardless of protest and expostulation, there were other arms and shoulders as vigorous as his own among the crowd of excursionists, and he found himself opposed and delayed in his onward progress, until, suddenly, as he was wedged upon the narrow stair that led down to the lower deck, having rushed up above in his eager search, and being met on his return by the pushing upward tide, he felt the shock of movement, heard the swish of the water beneath the paddle wheels, and knew with a hot thrill of shame and distress and anger, that the boat was off, that his comrade and the innocent young girl he had with him were left, and that he was powerless to help them !

In vain he struggled to make his way through the on-coming crowd, foolishly excited, impatient, and regardless of others, as such a crowd, on such an occasion, always is. He was simply obliged to stand back and let them pass, men, women, children, baskets, and all ; and when at last he was able to reach the bottom of the stair, he found Clara standing there, confronting him with a warning face.

"Don't do anything foolish ; listen to me," she said, in a low compelling voice, taking his











arm resolutely, and drawing him toward an unoccupied corner.

At the same moment, two other young figures, likewise a youth and a maiden, were standing gazing after them, on the darkening cliff, with faces suddenly grown white, and arms wildly outstretched in vain.

The reading of the witching tale at last ended, the sudden silence, the absence of any sound whatever coming up from the erstwhile noisy picnic ground below, struck them strangely. They looked at each other with questioning eyes, and starting to their feet, approached the edge of the bluff and looked and listened. Silence still; no sound but the soft swish of the waves upon the narrow beach far down below, the murmur of the wind in the pines, the swift whir of wings as bands of circling birds came wheeling toward the woods that made their shelter by night.

Only silence everywhere, solitude, loneliness; and the darkness creeping on stealthily from the thick groves behind to swallow up the light.

They gazed anxiously up the river, down the river, and their look suddenly seemed to become petrified as they fell upon a certain object, looming, shapeless, in the shadow of the wooded shore, moving slowly, but so surely,



farther and farther away from them, out of hearing of their wild call, out of sight of their outstretched arms; and the girl's tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth, as she strove to utter her desolate cry—

“The boat! They have gone, and left us here, alone in this lonesome place, at night!”



## CHAPTER IX.

### OUT OF THE MESHES.

“**T**HERE is no use in your hurrying below,” said Clara, glancing round to see that no one was near enough to hear. “I suppose it is the Captain you were going to look for to get him to stop the boat and put back to shore. It is no use, I am positive he wouldn’t do it; all these mothers with their youngsters would protest against it, and say people ought to attend to their business and be on time. But even if it could be done I’m not sure it would be the best thing to do.”

The young man stared at her, holding away as though still impatient to be gone. “What do you mean?” he said brusquely. “Not the best thing to be done?”

“No,” answered Clara, decidedly. “Of course as a man, you don’t see why; but a girl sees. If we keep quietly here out of the way, no one on board probably, will know or care whether they are here or not. Luckily there are very few people in this crowd whom we know; we haven’t spoken with any of them to-day except



those primping Carrs, and they happen to be all settled away off at the other end of the boat. If we don't publish the fact ourselves, I really believe it need never be known, this pretty performance of those two ninnies; but if we do, can't you imagine the gossip that would be set afloat? And do you think they would thank you for getting up an excitement here on the boat about them?"

Her companion stood looking at her as if brought to bay. "Gossip!" he replied bitterly. "I should think so! Oh, it is a shame, a shame! But how on earth is it going to be prevented? What do you propose? That the two ninnies, as you style your friend and mine, should be left alone up on those rocks all night? You know this boat won't make another trip after this!"

"Just so," rejoined Clara, coolly. "But as that is not my fault, you needn't throw it at my head in that fashion, sir! Nor insinuate that I am an utterly heartless wretch. I happen to know that Mr. Jerome, the young lady's father, has a boat of his own, only a row-boat it is true, but it will serve to bring his daughter home. You can go quietly to the house when we land, and tell him the state of things, and then leave the matter with him. He would very much prefer that, I fancy, and



at any rate, it is all we can do now. I don't see that we are responsible anyhow. They are not babies, as I said before, and it was their business to look out for themselves."

"We promised to go back for them," said young Carter, passionately. "The young lady was your guest: we ought to have stayed and shared their luck with them; it was the least we could have done!"

"And be fetched back by the furious papa? No thank you, Mr. Carter. I've had some very enjoyable little trips in that same row-boat, but I don't believe I should find that one agreeable. And as for leaving my guest, I invited Juliet Jerome as much for her own pleasure as my own, and she has chosen deliberately to spoil both. She put herself in a temper this morning because poor mamma had a headache, as though either she or I could help that! And then when I tried to break up the dullness at that tiresome lunch, I could see that she quite agreed with those stupid Carrs in their condemnation of me and my poor, pretty little jacket! She could scarcely continue to be civil to me afterward, and I confess I am getting a little tired of such overwhelming superiority. I consider myself as good a judge of what is right and proper as she is, and I don't fancy being always set down upon, and regarded



almost as a criminal. I'm heartily glad we are going off to the Springs next week, and then back to town; and if my influence can avail anything, we shan't impose ourselves upon stupid old Oakleigh or its priggish inhabitants very soon again! In the meanwhile, Mr. Carter, whatever change of opinion you may have honored me with since this morning, I tell you frankly I don't like the change in your manner or your tone; and I must beg you to remember that you are a gentleman and I am a lady until you return me to my mother's hands."

The young man flushed deeply all over his frank, ingenuous face, but he could not bring himself to speak as yet, and after a moment's pause, his companion added in a virtuous, injured tone,

"If I had been so heartless as you seem to think me or malicious enough to want to punish that girl as she deserves for the impertinent air she put on to me; I needn't have told you that her father had a boat, I might just have left her to take the consequences of her own carelessness. You don't seem to give me credit for that."

Young Carter looked at the girl speaking thus coolly with a gaze almost of horror. "Give you credit for not being quite a fiend!" was on his lips to utter, and he had to use all his



will to suppress it. He would have liked to say that to her; he would have liked to say also that he quite agreed in the opinion of the other listeners to the shameless story she had told, expecting them to find a good joke in what was neither more nor less than positive dishonesty; it would have been a relief to the feelings that were surging hot within him to tell her outright that he did think her not only almost, but altogether, a "criminal." But he was too much of a gentleman to use harsh language to a young girl, and especially a young girl whom he had liked and admired, whose society for the day he had eagerly sought, and in whose charge she had consented to place herself. He was obliged to content himself with only a muttered exclamation, and unable to sit quiet by her side, he started to his feet, and stood leaning over the railing of the boat, his face set in an expression of bitter annoyance as he looked out over the darkening waters in moody silence.

It was anything but an agreeable journey homeward to these two young people. Elsewhere gay parties were grouped together, laughing and talking, singing boat-songs with musical refrains, and continuing the enjoyment of their day's outing to the last moment. Little children, tired with pleasure, nestled up to



their mothers' side or climbed up into their lap and went peacefully to sleep; the gentlemen chatted together, or smoked in contented silence; the sunset reddened all the west, and set the water aglow with its rich reflection; over the woods in the East the evening star was already peeping, and the superintendent of the Sabbath school, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction, remarked to one of the deacons;

"One of the most delightful excursions we have ever had, sir. Everything has passed off without a single hitch."

It did not come into his province to look after the outsiders who had chosen to take that opportunity, at their own expense, and under their own management, to take a trip up the river; and he had no knowledge and no thought of the two estrays left behind upon the lonely shore, nor yet of the other two, holding themselves aloof from his charge and from each other, and finding but sorry company in their own disagreeable thoughts.

Miss Pickett sat in enforced silence, full of an angry sense of humiliation and disappointment; and her escort, after a sharp struggle with his own excited feelings, was only able to be politely civil to her during the rest of the way home; addressing now and then a perfunc-



tory remark, which she obliged herself to answer lest it should be noticed that he had relaxed in his attentions ; and doing his duty in the way of wraps, soda-water, ice-cream, and so on.

But it was a dreary journey for both of them, and a mutual relief when they parted with a very conclusive goodbye at the door of Clara's house.

"Pray don't let me detain you a single instant, Don Quixote," she said, with a mocking bow, as she ran lightly up the steps, and the young man, barely waiting till he saw the servant coming to the door, touched his hat formally, and hurried away, anxiously impatient, though strangely reluctant to be the bearer of such news, that no time should be lost in going to the rescue.

It was the most difficult task the youth had ever set himself, not alone because of the anxiety and annoyance which he knew it must bring to the young lady's family, but also because he felt certain that they would hold him in a measure responsible for what had occurred, and that he could not vindicate himself without inculpating his companion—a girl. This was of course, out of the question, and there was nothing to do but set his face and go forward, and this he did with much the feeling of



a 'forlorn hope' rushing forward to storm a garrison.

The brown cottage looked very pleasant and home-like, not in the least suggestive of an enemy's stronghold, as the young man threw open the gate and strode up the path. The soft hush of the summer evening was all about the sweet, shady old place; the yellow gleam of lamplight shone through the honeysuckled windows, and on the piazza were grouped two or three girlish figures, in hammocks, or reclining in easy chairs. One of these rose and came forward as young Carter approached the steps, and as he lifted his hat, he recognized that it was the oldest daughter, the young mistress of the house.

"Good evening, Miss Jocelyn,—” he tried to speak with a smile and in his usual easy fashion, "Is your father at home? Could I speak with him just a moment?"

"Why certainly, Mr. Carter. Come right in, to the study. He has not been well to-day; we couldn't persuade him to remain in bed, but at least we have coaxed him not to sit out in the night air."

The young man paused irresolute, perplexed. "Not well—not sit out in the night air? How then propose to him to take a two hours' journey in an open row-boat, night coming on apace,



the mists already gathering over the river;—had not he, perhaps, better hurry down to the dock, hire a boat and an oarsman, and go himself, without saying anything to the family? But no—how absurd! That would not be possible; they would be wild with anxiety before that time; would send to the Picketts to inquire—what in the world was he to do?

Jocelyn noticed his sudden look of discomfiture, and a quick apprehension came into her mind.

“What is it, Mr. Carter?” she asked anxiously. “By the way, I thought you were to be one of the excursionists to-day. Didn’t you go? or has the boat got back? Where is my sister? We have been sitting out here watching for her.” The young man hesitated, then plunged desperately into the inevitable.

“Perhaps, as your father is not well, I had better speak to you, Miss Jocelyn,” he said. “There is really not a minute of time to be wasted,” and in as few words as possible, he scarcely knew how, he made her acquainted with the miserable facts.

She turned so white, she looked so shocked and distressed, he feared for an instant that she might grow faint, and put out his hand involuntarily to support her. But she roused herself with a resolute effort, and answered



him in the same low guarded tone in which he had spoken.

“As you say, there isn't a minute to be lost. My poor little sister! what must she not have been suffering all this time! But I think, if it can possibly be helped, I will not tell my father to-night. He would insist upon going, and it might give him a serious illness. I will go with you, myself; I have learned to be a capital rower; and no stranger need know. One moment till I speak to my little sisters here.”

Jem and Janet had been looking on in some perplexity at this mysterious colloquy; Jem consumed with curiosity, and trying hard not to listen to what was evidently not intended for her to hear. She started up eagerly as her sister approached, but she was doomed to endure her pangs yet awhile longer. Jocelyn only said, speaking in a quick, low, decided voice,

“There is something I want you to do for me, children. Juliet isn't coming home just yet, and Mr. Carter wishes me to go and join her for awhile. If father doesn't ask about us, don't speak of our not being in; and don't put yourselves in his way so that he would be likely to ask. Stay out here as long as you like, and then go quietly to bed. I left him on the study lounge, deep in a new book, and I don't think he'll be likely to want anything till



we come in. But I'll tell Aunt Peggy to listen out for him. And to-morrow I'll tell you why I ask all this of you, but don't keep me now. Who will bring me a hat and shawl—two shawls? That's right, run along, Jem. Where's Joe, Janet? At the gymnasium? Oh, well, he'll go straight to bed when he comes home. Now, Mr. Carter, I am at your service."

And so, to the young fellow's bewildered admiration, without fuss, with every sensible caution, as quietly, and as practically, as if this tall fair girl had been the most business-like of men, the whole matter was arranged, and the pair were hurrying down the street that led to the river, while Jem and Janet stood gazing after them, scarcely knowing whether they were awake or dreaming, and Jem's tongue paralyzed for once!

They hurried along swiftly and silently, choosing a narrow side-street rather than the main thoroughfare upon which they would be likely to meet stray squads of picnickers taking their way homeward more leisurely than Carter had done, and they scarcely spoke as they sped breathlessly down the steep stony path that led to the old tumble-down wharf. The excursion-boat was no longer there; it had steamed on down to a lower dock; but the Jay-bird lay moored in her own little nook, after



the free and easy Southern fashion, which does not trouble itself much about boat-houses and padlocked doors.

It was the work of a moment to loosen the moorings, to unfasten the oars: Jocelyn stepped in as lightly and firmly as her companion, and as they pushed off from the shore took the water with as sure and steady a stroke as his; in another minute or two they were out in mid-stream, speeding along as the Jaybird had never sped before.

They were still very silent; they needed their breath for the sharp work they were doing, and besides, it seemed no time for words. Carter felt that nothing he could say would help the matter, and Jocelyn's heart was full.

She was feeling more as a mother would whose child was in like circumstance, than a sister, and she could not trust herself to give voice to what was swelling in her breast. She only summoned all her strength, all her will-power, and her nerve, and bent to her oars like a man, her vigorous young arms sending out strokes as effective as Carter's own, her eager glance reaching forward to measure the distance as they shot on past the retreating banks; while the dominating thought in her mind, which kept coursing and re-coursing against the dark background of her troubled conscious,



ness was, "How glad, how *thankful* I am, it was put into my heart to persuade father to get this boat!"

Her companion respected her silence, and only broke in upon it now and then to entreat her not to over exert herself, to urge that they should relieve each other at the oars, and so reserve their strength. But she was too anxious and impatient to yield except for a moment now and then to ease her straining shoulders, and fill her lungs with a long deep breath: excitement, solicitude, tenderness, all served to nerve her arm; she felt quite sure that her strength would hold out as long as it was needed; and so the young man presently gave over trying to persuade her; they pulled as if for life, and the gallant little boat sped on, like a winged thing, over the darkling waters, under the edge of the overhanging bluffs, to the rescue!

Suddenly Jocelyn broke out, "Thank God! there is the moon!" as a great golden disk lifted itself from behind the wooded crest, pouring a flood of mellow radiance on river and on shore; and at the same moment, the same outburst of thankfulness sprang from the lips of those whom they were coming to seek—

"Oh! there is the moon! now at least it will not be quite dark!"



When Juliet first realized that the boat had actually gone, without them, that she had been deserted by her faithless friend, that she was really left alone, upon that lonely shore, with only a young man, a comparative stranger, albeit of the same blood, she had felt almost paralyzed by the shock. But the compelling thought. "What will father, what will Jocelyn think?" quickly roused her to a sharp consciousness of all it meant.

"What a fool, what a blind, stubborn fool I have been!" she said to herself with bitter self-rebuke, "to persist in trusting to my own judgment, having my own way, and holding on to that girl for my friend, even when I knew—when I knew! It all comes from that; if I hadn't gone with her to-day, if she hadn't made me fairly ashamed to be seen with her, I should not have left the other people; I shouldn't have gone off and spent the afternoon alone with a boy—I never did a thing in such bad taste, before! I shouldn't have let all this come upon me. I deserve it all, whatever happens, whatever is said; but it is hard upon the others. And I prided myself so upon being just!"

It was not Juliet Jerome's way to wring her hands, to cry, and be hysterical; but she grew so white, she stood looking such a picture of chill hopeless misery as the thought of all the



pain, the mortification, that would come to the family through her—her, it was almost incredible!—that poor young Pryor was almost beside himself with anxiety and distress.

“Don’t, don’t I beg of you, Miss Juliet,” he entreated, “look so despairing; feel so dreadfully about it! Or I shall feel like going and knocking my stupid head against that oak there! It is all my fault; it was my business to look out; I know you can never forgive me—but if you only—there must be some way—” and then with a sudden rush of relief— “Oh! why your father has a boat, has he not? Why, he will come for you, of course, the minute he hears—”

“The minute he hears!” Oh, but that was just the thought that pierced the girl’s heart with the keenest pang. He would hear, yes, doubtless; there would be plenty of tongues to wag freely, to tell how she had gone off—she, his daughter, Juliet,—with that Pickett girl, and a couple of young men; and how she hadn’t even thought enough of herself or her people to guard against being left behind—

Oh certainly; her father would be very sure to hear more than the bare fact—and that her name should be lightly taken—and be obliged to know of it—that indeed, was as iron entering her soul.



The pain and the shame of it were so keen, that the proud, reticent girl could not bring herself even to speak of it to her companion, and she only answered, "Oh yes, I was going to remind you of that. Of course they'll send for us; but it will be hours before they can get here; late night before we can get back; and my father is not well, I left him in bed."

Her voice failed her; her lips trembled, and the first tears sprang to her eyes. She turned away, in speechless distress, and stood leaning against a tree, a very image of remorse and woe.

Douglas Pryor paced back and forth along the brow of the cliff for a few moments, arraigning himself at the bar of his own conscience, finding himself guilty, and sentencing himself without mercy. He grew so miserable under this process that he presently came up to his equally wretched companion and broke out with almost comical desperation.

"I say, Miss Juliet, this way madness lies! I begin to feel myself such a villain that pretty soon I shall be convinced that I am not fit to live any longer; and then—over the cliff I go! And if I do, you know, well—I'm afraid it'll make you feel worse instead of better!—So do let's make the best of it; it isn't actually a gallows business, after all; and when you tell



your folks just how it was, they're not going to mind it so awfully much as you think. Come now; let's get down below while it's light enough to pick our way down the path: maybe we might spy some fisherman's boat coming by; but at any rate, yours will be along before such a very great while, and till then, we'll just have to play Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday!"

He offered his hand to the young girl, and she suffered him to help her down the steep and rocky paths that led to the landing below. It did seem a little more cheerful there, with the river flowing sparkling by close at hand, than up among the deepening shadows of the grove, and Juliet, feeling herself far more to blame than her companion, had no wish to add to his self-reproach, and did her best to repress her own anxiety and distress, and to get over the long hours of waiting as little drearily as possible.

She could not have had a better comrade in such an exigency. Young Pryor was not only a well-bred and well-read young fellow, but he was possessed of an unfailing fund of good spirits which like Mark Tapley's came out strongest when circumstances were hardest. He made talk on all manner of subjects, and he bustled about on all sorts of errands with a



view to her comfort. He broke off quantities of branches from the trees, the leaves of which he stripped off to make a more comfortable seat than the rough beams of the dock afforded. Over these he spread her shawl, and would have added his coat if she would have permitted it. Then he set himself to gather sticks and bits of driftwood such as always gather by the water-side, and heaped them up in a neat little pile.

“That’s for our signal fire when it gets dark ; luckily, I have matches in my pocket,” he said. “People in distress always light signal fires, you know, Miss Juliet. And by the way, did you ever read a story called ‘Island Polma’? I declare, I fairly held my breath to see whether that passing ship would notice their poor little bonfire which the rain put out as fast as they lighted it. Never read it? Well then, I am going to tell you about it, for it’s the most thrilling story of shipwreck I ever read, and there was the bravest girl in it, just as brave as— Well, you see, they were sailing from—

And then he began to tell the tale, and told it so well that his auditor could not but be beguiled of some of her sad thoughts. Then she must tell him a story, he insisted, a long one, the whole of some book which she liked, and which he had not read. After that he led



the talk once more to his old home up on the Virginia farm; to the fun they had had hunting and fishing and riding at tournaments; to the horse he had raised himself from a colt which was the finest creature in the whole county; and to the 'possum he had tamed till it followed him round like a spaniel. Then he coaxed from her the history of various pets of her own and her sisters, guinea-pigs, pigeons, white mice, and the like: and so, in one way, or the other, with frequent long pauses in which all the forlorn state of things would so rush over Juliet's mind that she could neither talk nor listen, nor do aught but mourn inwardly over her own folly, the hours at length bore their tedious length away. The moon came out in a flood of glory that paled to insignificance their flickering fire, and at last, at last, the welcome sound, so eagerly waited, so keenly listened for, the regular rhythmic splash of oars, was heard, the most blissful music that had ever fallen upon their ears! They sprang to their feet, crying out in their joy, waving over their heads brands snatched blazing from the pile, and almost ready in their excitement, to spring into the river and swim out to meet the little boat that came gallantly on over the silvered tide, the two rowers bending to their oars, and ceasing not in their swift strong strokes till at length



the keel was beached upon the pebbled shore, and the long agony was over !

Then, while young Pryor dashed forward at sight of a lady in the boat, to offer his hand to help her out, and to pour forth a torrent of explanations and regrets, Juliet suddenly seemed transformed to stone, to a mere statue of grief and shame, and stood, her face covered with her hands, shrinking away in speechless humiliation, as Jocelyn, springing from the boat, hurried eagerly forward and threw her arms around her.

"My poor, poor little sister!" was all she said ; "how you must have suffered!"

Not one word of her own pain and anxiety, not a whisper of reproach or reproof; and all the way home her only thought was to quiet the wild passion of weeping which would at last have its way with the overwrought Juliet; to soothe her fears, to comfort her grief, to envelop her with tenderest loving-kindness, and save her from all fateful consequences.

"Mr. Carter thinks that no one on board the boat noticed that you were not there," she took courage to whisper, as, the homeward journey at last completed, they were walking up the path to their own door. "And you need not see father at all to-night; I see his study-lamp is out, and there is no light in his bedroom



either. The children seem to have gone to bed too, and if you had rather—if you think it would be best—perhaps—”

She hesitated, and Juliet hastily answered her unspoken thought.

“No, no,” she said with a sort of nervous desperation. “He must know all about it; I couldn’t feel honest if he didn’t. And if other people bear, and I don’t see how they can help it, why, I shall just have to hear what they choose to say, that’s all. I deserve it all; I brought it on myself, but at least, I won’t be a coward. Only poor father—I don’t know how I’ll get my courage up, and he not well.”

“Shall I speak to him for you, in the morning, dear? I will, if you would rather—”

Juliet hesitated: her proud, self-reliant nature ordinarily would have preferred to make its own confessions; but in this case, she could not help shrinking. “It is awfully good of you, Jocelyn,” she said. “I know you won’t like it, and I don’t deserve it,—” but a kiss prevented her from finishing her sentence, and she turned hastily and went into the house and up to her room, leaving her sister to make the last good-byes and acknowledgments to the two young men.

That her sister should prove to be still her old highminded, honorable self, was the only



redeeming point in the whole unhappy affair to Jocelyn's mind: and she was glad to spare her the pain and mortification of telling her own story. It would have been harder for Juliet, but it was not a pleasant task for herself, and she found herself hesitating nervously with her hand on the latch of the study door, as she went down early to get a word with her father before breakfast. She was possessed of a goodly portion of womanly tact however, and she managed to present the affair so lightly, while keeping strictly to the truth, that her father took it with much less seriousness than she had feared, the whole thing being safely ended before he had even heard of it.

"Giddy, thoughtless young people!" he said; "they are so apt to think they know it all—and what hard lessons it takes to teach them that they don't! That poor child! she must have suffered more than a little: it's a wonder she isn't sick with the worry and the damp; and I think likely she would have been but for your promptness and cleverness in doing exactly the right thing. I don't know what we should all do without you, daughter: day by day, I see more and more how like you are to your dear mother."

"O father!" Jocelyn felt her little nervous tremor giving place to a thrill of tender joy,



and she took courage to stoop down and press her lips to his bearded cheek.

"Then you don't think of saying anything to Juliet, poor girl?"

And her father answered, "No, I think not. I feel as if I could safely leave the management of these things to you;" and contented himself with giving only a grave, steady glance and a meaning shake of the head, when the young girl, looking pale and embarrassed, came forward to bid him good morning.

Jocelyn had found a moment also to speak to the little girls, to satisfy their curiosity and ask them to be quiet; and from that time forth no mention of the unfortunate occurrence was permitted to be made in the household; nor, strange though it seemed in a small country town, where few things happened out of the ordinary, and most people knew each other more or less familiarly, was ever a comment heard from without, or any evidence given that the circumstance had been made cognizant to any but the parties immediately concerned.

To their infinite relief, the indirect author of all the trouble fulfilled the purpose she had expressed of leaving Oakleigh for the rest of the season; and the whole affair presently faded out of remembrance.

With all perhaps save Juliet herself: the rec-



ollection of her own self-will and perverseness lingered long in her mind; and Jocelyn could not but note with thankfulness the softening and subduing effect upon her proud and self-sufficing nature. There was a welcome abatement also in the chill aloofness with which her younger sister had held herself from her since she had been called to take a place of authority in the household; and Jocelyn quoted to herself more than once nowadays the comforting old sayings, "There's a silver lining to every cloud," and "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good."

She was sitting one morning in the late summer time, at the parlor window, with little Jessie leaning against her knee, watching a huge spider's web, which the child had discovered and brought her to look at. It stretched its filmy surface halfway across the open window, and was a thing of wonder and of beauty in the exquisite fineness of its silky threads, and the almost more than human delicacy and skill with which they were interwoven.

"I s'pose old Mr. Spider thought he'd catch lots of flies in that big web!" said Jessie, pointing toward it; and Jocelyn, making a picture in her mind of the luckless insects struggling in the web, felt a curious sudden thrill of thankfulness at the thought that was subtly suggested



by it—how her sister had been rescued from the snare of those “evil communications” which “corrupt good manners.”

“It was exceedingly hard on her, poor thing,” she thought musingly. “She was very brave and plucky about it, and ready to take any trouble it might bring her; but I saw how she almost winced every time a visitor came, or any one stopped to speak to us on the street, for weeks and weeks afterward. That’s one thing in that dreadful girl’s favor at least; she had the grace to keep her own counsel. Though I suppose she didn’t care to publish her own share in the matter, either. Well, I’m thankful she’s gone—Juliet is a changed girl nowadays; so much softer and less “offish.” Indeed, all the children are as good as they can be nowadays, bless their hearts; and father seems more cheerful, and—he seems to be having all sorts of a good time, traveling about from one beautiful place to another, and getting on capitally with his cranky old lady. “Heigho!” with a little half laugh, half sigh: “everything really seems to be going on so smoothly, I’m half afraid it’s ‘too good to las’!”” as Aunt Peggy says.”

“Why don’t you answer me Dottelyn?” she was just here conscious of Jessie’s demanding in rather an injured tone. “I been askin’ you



an' askin' you, an' you don't pay any 'tention at all. Shall I brush the old cobweb away, and not let the spider get the flies?"

Jocelyn laughed and gave her a little squeeze. "Dottelyn didn't hear you, dear. She was away in Dreamland, I guess. Brush the web away? It's almost a pity, isn't it, it's so pretty. But I suppose if any one should happen to call, it would look like rather poor house-keeping. And by the way, there is some one coming through the gate now, Jessie; a gentleman with a package in his hand. Who in the world can it be?"



## CHAPTER X.

### WHICH SHALL IT BE?

“**W**HY! it’s Uncle Harry, from Washington!” Jocelyn exclaimed in the next breath, and starting up with a look of pleasure, she took her little sister by the hand, and went down the lawn to meet him. Now Uncle Harry, was no uncle at all, only a cousin, of their mother; but he was a great favorite in the Jay family, because as they said, “he was so jolly, and always seemed to bring a breeze with him.” They did not see him very often, but his rare visits were always bright spots to look back to, and held always a pleasant flavor of bon-bons, toys, company dinners, outings, and good times generally. So there was a unanimous outbreak of pleasure at his arrival, which took on an added zeal when he said in his hearty way,

“Well, I’ve come to stay five or six days with you this time, young folks, for I’ve brought you a new nonsense-thing, which I think you’ll all enjoy, and which will take me that long, I reckon, to show you how to use.”



"Is it in there?" shyly inquired Jessie, glancing round from her perch on his knee to the parcel which he had set down upon a table.

"Yes, that's precisely where it is, Missy," Uncle Harry answered, giving her a sudden little jump, and then setting her down on the floor. "I brought it up myself, and left my portmanteau to be sent on afterward from the boat; and I took particular pains to arrive on a Saturday when I knew you youngsters would all be at home. Now, wasn't that good of me?"

"Course," said Jem, "but it wouldn't be you if it wasn't, you know!" and while a laugh arose at her rather mixed English, she added coaxingly, "And were you going to open it right now, Uncle Harry?"

"Why Jem!" said the others in a rebuking tone, but Uncle Harry only laughed again, and said: "Certainly; that's what I brought it for, to open it, and no time like the present. Lend us a hand here, Joe, with these strings."

A few moments of eager expectation followed, while the whole group gathered round, watching the process, always so slow to young impatient eyes! of untying the many tight knots with which the package was secured; and then when the last thick fold of wrapping paper was removed, there was a long stare of perplexity



as nothing appeared but a box, a simple oblong box of black walnut, whose outer aspect gave no hint of what it might contain, or what purpose it might serve.

Jem, as usual, was the first one to make inquiries.

"But what is it?" she asked. "What's it full of, Uncle Harry? What's it meant for?"

"Can't you guess, any of you?" asked Uncle Harry, looking round gleefully at the group of puzzled faces.

"It isn't a writing-desk," ventured Janet, doubtfully, with a secret wish in her heart that it might have been, and intended for her!

"Nor a work-box," suggested Jocelyn.

"Nor a stereoscope," added Juliet.

"Hold on! hold on a minute," cried Joe, who had been scrutinizing it keenly with his practical boy's eye: "I'll bet I know what it is; It's a photograph-thing, I'll bet. It's something you can take pictures with your own self. I've read of 'em, and I've seen the picture of one in an advertisement; not like this exactly, but like enough to make me pretty sure. Isn't that it, Uncle Harry?"

And when Uncle Harry laughed, and said, "Go up head, Joe," there was a general cry of delight at the idea of something so unusual and so interesting in prospect. "Kodaks" and



"Hawk-eyes" and the sundry other magical contrivances for the taking of "instantaneous photographs" were common enough in the neighborhood of great cities or show places haunted by tourists, but such a thing was a novelty as yet in this out-of-the-way country town, and the generous giver saw at once that he had bestowed all the pleasure he had anticipated.

"I don't believe there's another one in Oakleigh," said Juliet; and Jem begged, "Could you show us how it acts right away, Uncle Harry, please?"

But Jocelyn was obliged to absent herself for awhile to hold a consultation with Aunt Peggy:

"Why didn't you bring Cousin Sally with you, Uncle Harry," she asked, pausing as she was leaving the room, to ask. "And little Nannie, though I don't suppose she's very little now. You took possession of us so with your mysterious box we haven't had time to remember our manners; but we would have loved to have them come. Why didn't you bring them?"

"Well, it would have to be bringing literally in Nan's case," said Uncle Harry, looking grave. "The poor little monkey had nothing better to do than to fall out of a swing—stand-



ing up and going too high, of course—and away went her ankle-bone—broken.”

“Oh, oh!” went up a cry of surprise and pity from the listening group.

“Happily it is doing pretty well now, though it was a bad fracture, the surgeon said, and the poor child suffered a great deal, and still suffers. The worst of it is they say she’ll not be able to walk again for a couple of months, or more; and that’s going to be hard on such an active child as she is.”

“I should think so indeed!” sounded a sympathizing chorus; “Poor little Nan!”

“But we don’t grumble at that; we’re so thankful there’s no real danger to be feared. Of course, if there had been, I couldn’t have left her; and yet—” he hesitated a little; “I had a purpose in that too, more or less connected with her comfort. Did you say you must run away for awhile, Jocelyn? Now, my dear, if you are going to spend your time in the kitchen, or put yourself out at all for me, I shall just pack up my traps and face right about for home again!”

“No, no, you mustn’t pack up this again!” cried Jessie, putting her hand hastily on the strange box which was still a matter of pleasing mystery to her; and then they all laughed, and Uncle Harry began to take its various belong-



ings apart, and explain "how it worked" to the young people who were eagerly interested to know just how it was to be handled, and if they could really learn to take pictures with it themselves, "just like photographers."

Uncle Harry gave them all the assurances they wanted, but he would not consent to attempt to verify them until luncheon was over, and the young house-mistress was at leisure to join the party; then they gathered out on the lawn, full of eagerness, mixed, it must be confessed, with some incredulity, and prepared to witness, and to assist, so far as permitted, at the wonderful process.

There Mr. Jerome found them, busy, excited and happy, when he returned from his office, early, as usual on a Saturday afternoon. He looked a little bewildered at first as he came up the path, but beamed with pleasure as soon as he got near enough to recognize his guest.

"O! old fellow, how d'ye?" he said, clapping him affectionately on the shoulder. "Mighty glad to see you down our way again. Dropped down from the skies, as usual, without a note of warning. How did you leave the folks? And what's going on here? Set up for a traveling sun-artist, hey? Always up to something or other, aren't you; same old Harry."



"O! but father," burst in Jem, unable to contain herself, "this is such a nice something! He's taken everything, all of us children, and Aunt Peggy and Mahaly, and the barn and the horse-chestnut and the front and the back and the side of the house——" "And would have taken your tongue, only it was too long for his plates," interposed Joe impatiently, but Jem could not be stopped until she had finished. "And he says they're all real pictures just like what they take down at the gallery, only they've got to be shut up in a dark room first, and, and, *enveloped*, or something or other!"

There was a shout of laughter at this, but Joe growled, "If you could only be shut up in a dark room and enveloped with silence for awhile, you might *develop* into less of a magpie by-and-by!"

"Oh well, *developed* then!" persisted Jem, shrugging her shoulders, and returning undaunted to the front. "So father, you must just sit down now, right away, and be taken too, mustn't he, Uncle Harry?"

"Oh, why certainly,—and a new group began immediately to be arranged, with a great deal of laughing discussion over the various *poses*; and the summons to dinner found the whole party still on the grass, talking over, and experimenting with the new "fad."



Uncle Harry had to see to putting his "negatives" in a place of safety before going into the dining-room; and he begged of Jocelyn the use of some small unoccupied apartment in which he might perform the finishing processes. A little empty room up on the third floor was placed at his disposal; and thither, when the pleasant evening was over, he betook himself with his various paraphernalia, bottles of chemicals, basins of water, and so on, and prepared to put the plates through the operation known as developing, assisted only by Joe, to the great discomfiture of his sister Jem.

Her bump of curiosity was abnormally developed, we remember, and she was exceedingly anxious to see the whole performance to its very end. There was something tantalizingly mysterious about a "dark room," a "red light," and so on; Joe's grin of triumph when Uncle Harry designated only him as his companion, saying that this was emphatically one of the cases where "too many cooks spoiled the broth," was an added aggravation; and altogether, Jem allowed herself to get wrought up into such a state of excitability that she could not go to sleep.

For the first time in her small life, the foolish youngster found herself persistently wakeful; and she tossed and tumbled about so much



that Janet protested she might as well be in bed with a jumping-jack. She however, presently fell asleep, and as soon as Jem felt sure she was quite "sound," she slipped softly out of bed, and stole noiselessly out of the open door into the passage. Peering eagerly down its shadowy length she spied the gleam of red light, shining out beneath the door, and the sense of mystery increased, and whetted her curiosity to an absurd extent. She stood shrinking against the wall in her little night-gown, watching, listening, and longing to be within the forbidden chamber, till suddenly, startled by some sound within, she scurried back to her bed, where she at last dropped asleep. But her unsatisfied desire haunted her dreams, and was the first thing that presented itself to her consciousness when she woke in the early morning; and too restless to think of trying to sleep again, she made up her mind to get up, dress, and be on hand the first one when Uncle Harry came down, to ask him to let her see how he finished the pictures, before breakfast.

Janet was still slumbering deeply; there was no sound of any one astir in the house, and suddenly, as Jem dipped her little flushed face into the washbasin, some one seemed to whisper in her ear:



"Why not go and see if you can't get in? They wouldn't think of fastening the door, and you have as much right to know it all as Joe. You can just slip in and take a peep; nobody will be any the wiser, and what earthly harm can it do?"

"None at all," Jem persuaded herself to believe, and making no effort to resist the tempter's suggestion, she put on her frock, and stole out once more into the dim and empty hall. She paused outside her door to listen, but there was no sound audible save the sleepy twitter of a bird, and the long regular breathing of the peaceful slumberers in the other apartments. All unseen and unheard of any *human* creature, naughty Jem crept along the hall to the little room at its end, and, scarcely daring to draw breath, cautiously turned the latch of the door. It was not fastened in any other way, and she found herself without any difficulty admitted to the charmed precincts.

Standing there in her bare feet, peering eagerly around, there did not seem to be anything very mysterious, or even interesting in sight. The walnut box, a few pieces of what looked like dirty paper soaking in a basin, two or three phials filled with what looked like medicine, that was all. She picked these up absently, one after the other, and pulling out the corks,



put her nose to the contents. They did not have a very agreeable smell, any of them, and after another scrutinizing glance which failed to discover anything to satisfy curiosity, she said to herself,

“Pooh! there was nothing worth coming for! They didn’t make any pictures after all!”

And letting herself out as quietly as she had entered, she made her way noiselessly back to her room, and prepared to finish her toilet, and be the first one down-stairs to greet Uncle Harry.

She had actually forgotten it was Sunday morning, until her father’s grave glance as she broke out eagerly the instant the gentlemen appeared with some question about the pictures, recalled her to herself. Uncle Harry saw her little abashed look and patted her kindly on the shoulder.

“I’m afraid they’re not successful, these first attempts of ours,” he said in a little aside; “we shall try again to-morrow, and you shall see it all.”

And with this she was obliged to be content, for the others came trooping down now, and prayers, and breakfast followed; and then it was time to get ready for Sunday-school.

Now Janet was not feeling very well this morning. One of the nervous headaches to



which she had been subject from a little child, and which Joe declared were the consequence of having such a wonderful brain, had laid its hand upon her: she looked pale, languid, and heavy-eyed, and could eat nothing. Jocelyn decided it was best for her not to go out in the sun, but stay quietly at home, and keep in a cool shaded room, until the pain had worn itself away. The poor child was fain to take her advice, and after the others had departed, she betook herself to the parlor, where the blinds were closed, and where there was a broad low lounge, with a big soft pillow which was especially comforting to an aching head. There she lay down, and as she had promised Jocelyn not to strain her eyes with reading, and had not got to sleep quite so early as usual the night before, she presently found herself growing drowsy, and dropped off into a gentle doze.

From this she gradually awakened to a consciousness of voices near the window beneath which she was lying, and she listened in a dreamy, half-comprehending way to what they were saying.

"The poor little thing has had a pretty hard time of it already," were the first words that vaguely reached her drowsy ear. "And she is going to find it awfully tedious, shut up in one room, away from all her playmates and her



pleasures, for weeks to come. I felt so sorry for her the other day the notion suddenly popped into my head to run right down here and try and borrow one of your youngsters to come up to town and keep her company. You're a lucky fellow to have so many daughters, and such a nice lot of girls too. I declare I shouldn't know which one to ask. It would have to be one of the little ones, I suppose; my chick is only eleven or thereabouts; and if you will really be so good as to spare me one for a few weeks—of course we shouldn't keep the poor child a prisoner in Nan's room all the time, we should do all we could to give her an enjoyable visit—why, I should be exceedingly grateful, and so would Nan and her mother. And I should have to ask you to choose for me between that cunning little curly-headed magpie, who seems to be so full of life and spirits, and the older one, with the big thoughtful eyes, and the pretty quiet ways. I should be glad of either, whichever it suited best all round to go."

Before Uncle Harry had reached this point,—of course she knew his voice!—Janet found herself very wide awake indeed. What! a visit to Washington—to a beautiful home, where there was everything that wealth could devise to make a visit delightful, to stay with that nice little Nan, who had made them all so



fond of her on the one occasion of her visiting them in Oakleigh two summers ago—a chance, a possibility of such a blissful happening for *her*—Janet could scarcely believe her own ears. Where there are five girls in a family opportunities of that kind do not come very frequently to any one of them in particular. Such trips cost money, and vacations came in the summer when city people were not apt to be at home; and Janet had never before seen any near prospect of any such good fortune coming to her. Why even Juliet had never been to Washington, she remembered. She recollected her mother going one winter and taking with her Jessie who was too young to be left behind. Jocelyn had gone once too with her father, and had brought back enchanting stories of the beauty of the city and all the interesting things there were to see; the great white marble Capitol, the picture of which was in the geographies—only think, she had stood on top of its dome, away high up in the air, so high that the people in the street below looked like dwarfs! And the monument, whose great white shaft seemed almost to pierce the clouds; the President's house, the beautiful little parks, like blossoming gardens, all over the city; then the journey itself, in a steamboat, to sleep in one of those cute little staterooms, and have supper at a big



table, full of travelers like herself; to escape school for another month, have a new dress, and nothing to do but sit and talk with Nan, read the delightful story-books of which she always had such quantities, go out to drive with her mother, and be taken to see the sights by Uncle Harry, who always remembered little girls' weakness for ice-cream and soda-water—oh, it was like a fairy dream, and Janet was tempted to pinch herself to see if she really were awake, and those were actual people, Uncle Harry and her father, talking outside the window.

For now it was her father speaking in his grave, deliberate way, and forgetting in her excitement that she had no right to listen to what was certainly not intended for her to hear, she raised herself upon her elbow and strained her ear to catch every word as it fell.

“I really hardly know what to say, Harry. I always left the settling of such matters to their mother, and now I sometimes find myself at sea. Of course I shall be only glad, any and all of us would be, to do anything in our power to help your little girl through the tedium of convalescence, and I've no doubt their sister could get one of them ready to go back with you; but which one, that I would rather not take it upon me to decide. Wouldn't the best



plan be for you to choose for yourself; take note of them while you stay, observe their different dispositions and ways, and make up your own mind which one would best serve the purpose in view? Of course I know you would make it pleasant for either of them, but don't you think that is the best way?"

"Yes I do; I think it's a good scheme, and I'm awfully obliged to you, old fellow, for being willing to spare one of them." Janet heard her uncle answer in his hearty way; and then her father said, "Well, we'll broach the subject to Jocelyn after church, but not say anything to the children perhaps, till you have made your decision. And by the way, there is the bell beginning to sound: you are coming with me, I take it?"

"Oh, certainly;" and then they moved off together, and Janet sank back upon her pillow, her hands clasped, her cheeks glowing, her eyes wide with excitement.

What a prospect to open up all of a sudden in her quiet uneventful life! And surely she had the best chance of being chosen. Uncle Harry could not possibly think that noisy harum-scarum little Jem would make as good a companion for a sick child as she would; he had spoken to her father of her "pretty, quiet ways," already; and she would be careful that



he should not find them otherwise. She would take pains too to be on hand to wait upon him, and not give Jocelyn cause to speak to her where he perhaps might hear it, about sitting round, buried in a book, when others were busy. Oh, she would be very careful! How lucky it was that she should happen to know about it beforehand!

And then, as suddenly, as the lightning leaps forth from the thunder cloud and pierces the darkness with its fiery gleam, so suddenly, so swiftly, something seemed to flash into Janet's soul and reveal to her in its true light the unworthy purpose that was creeping into it. It was the sword of the Spirit, which pierces asunder; and the child started up as though its flaming blade had in very deed flashed before her eyes. "What!" she asked herself, while the hot blood surged to her cheek; "was that her own self, her mother's 'good little Janet,' planning to take a mean advantage of her own sister, good-natured, warm-hearted little Jem? And what right had she to know, anyhow? Was it possible that she was a listener, an eaves-dropper, seeking to find out things which were not meant for her to know?"

But no; she could not accuse herself of that; she was sure she had not meant to listen; she



had been so drowsy, only half conscious of what was being said until it *was* said—she must go at once and tell her father and Uncle Harry how she had unintentionally overheard them! —But no—she could not do that now; there was the click of the gate, they were already on their way to church, she must wait till they came back. And in the mean time, would she be mean and selfish toward Jem? No indeed! She did not see how she could even have such a thought for an instant! She could not tell her; no, she had no right to do that, and put her on her good behavior; but she would stay with her as much as she could while Uncle Harry was here, and watch out for her, and do whatever might be in her power to keep her from making an unfavorable impression. And for her own part, why she would not take advantage of the knowledge she had gained accidentally; she would be just her own every-day self; she would *play fair*, whatever happened—and then, why then, if Uncle Harry wanted her, she would be awfully glad to go; and if he thought Jem would suit best, why then, she'd be glad for Jem too!

And having settled the matter thus in her own honorable little soul, she lay down again and tried not to think any more about it; for



all this excitement was not making the pain in her head any less.

She started up once more however, when she heard them all coming home from church. "I must go and speak to them right now," she said to herself, "while the girls are up-stairs, taking off their things."

But the sudden movement and the nervous dread of what she had to do sent such a fresh pang quivering through her throbbing temples that she sank down on the pillow again with a moan ; and Jocelyn, looking in to see how she was getting on, insisted upon taking her up-stairs at once, undressing her, and putting her to bed—"the only place where you can be really comfortable, poor little girl !"

Thus the opportunity passed for the present. Dinner came, and then the gentlemen went off for a long stroll by the river bank ; Jocelyn, after coaxing Janet to drink a cup of tea, took Jessie out on the piazza to keep her quiet ; Joe and Juliet each took possession of a hammock on the lawn with their library books, and Jem carried her book into the parlor, and stretched herself out on the same wide sofa where Janet had been lying during the morning.

Ordinarily, not even Sunday afternoon found restless little Jem content to remain quiet in any one place very long ; but she had slept



less than usual the night before; her book proved rather dull and "grown-uppy" for her childish taste; she found herself dropping into little dozes over it, and waking up again with a start; and presently, "or ever she was aware," she dropped off and did not wake up, but went journeying peacefully to the "land of Nod."

How long she slept she did not know, but when she was roused by what seemed to be Joe's voice a long way off, calling her name, the room was all in dusk, and she did not know at first whether it was evening, or the middle of the night. She sprang to her feet, and tried to rub the sleep out of her eyes, and then the voice seemed to come nearer, and she made out that it was really Joe, and he was calling in no mild tones——

"Jem, where are you? Here we are, almost through supper!" and Jocelyn wants you to come along.

"Almost through supper!" Jem gave a hasty pat, first one side, then the other, to her ruffled hair; rubbed her eyes hard again, gave her short skirts a little shake, and saying to herself, "There, I guess I'll do," hurried out of the parlor and through the dimly-lighted hall to the dining-room. As she opened the door, the sudden dazzle of the lamplight upon the white table cloth set out with glittering china and



silver, made her half-shut her eyes hastily again, and she stood there blinking for a moment till a sudden loud exclamation from Joe made her open them wide enough.

“Look at her nose!” he cried, with a shout of laughter. “What have you been doing to it, Jem?” It’s as black and shiny as a piece of coal. Look at it, everybody! She’s been sticking it into something, I bet. Did you take the cork out of the shoe-polish with your teeth, youngster?”

“No, I haven’t! I haven’t touched a bit of shoe-polish to-day!” cried Jem in reply, puzzled and excited at seeing the strange look with which every one was regarding her. “What are you all staring at me that way for? What’s the matter with my nose? I don’t feel anything—” and she broke away from Joe who had caught hold of her arm, and rushed to examine it for herself in the old-fashioned mirror above the mantle-shelf.

Sure enough, there it was, just as Joe had said, the tip of her little upturned saucy nose black and shiny as a piece of coal; and Jem, frightened and amazed, turned round with a cry of consternation:

“What is it, father? What is it, Jocelyn? What is the matter with me—am I poisoned—I don’t like it—I d-don’t know,—and you’re



all a-laughing—" And she was about to burst into a fit of crying, when Joe broke in again above the puzzled exclamation of the others—

"Poisoned? Nonsense, you great baby, you! You'd better try and think what mischief you've been up to. I bet anything it's just as I said; you've been poking that little nose of yours into something that didn't concern it. Come now, aha!" as Jem's face all of a sudden, at a certain recollection, became dyed with crimson; "Aha! didn't I say so?" and a sudden light dawning upon his mind; "I bet I know what it is too, you little meddlesome witch, you. You've been into that little room up-stairs; you've been fussing with Uncle Harry's photographic things; you've been smelling at his chemicals, and got something on your nose,—that's what's the matter. A-ah! you little Paul Pry, you!"

"Joe, Joe!" interposed his father in an authoritative tone, "don't speak to your sister in that way;" and Jocelyn gave him a reproachful look and said in an aside, "I wouldn't have thought you were so hard-hearted, Joe! Come here, Jem," drawing the little girl, now sobbing passionately, close to her side, and putting a protecting arm around her. "Come, get over crying as soon as you can, and tell right out what you have been doing. That's the



only way to make amends for a fault, own up to it and be sorry for it."

"Yes," said her father, speaking more sternly than was his wont; "Speak out, Jemima, and let us know what all this means. Have you been meddling again with what was none of your business? I was in hopes you had got over that unpleasant habit of yours."

"Oh, oh, oh," sobbed poor Jem in a tumult of shame and distress. "I—I—just wanted to see if the p-pictures had truly come; and I couldn't see any—and, and, I just sm-smelled at the bottles a little. I d-didn't think it was any harm, and I'm so, so sorry, Uncle Harry! Do, do you think my nose will st-stay black all the time, please sir?"

Uncle Harry could not possibly help bursting out laughing.

"Why no, you poor little monkey," he hastened to re-assure the distressed little creature.

"You have evidently got hold of my nitrate of silver, and nitrate of silver has a bad habit of blackening everything it touches. But you needn't be a bit alarmed for your nose; I've had it on my fingers many a time, and it always comes off again. Takes two or three days though, to wear off—washing doesn't do any good, little sister," as Jessie, her small face full



of pitying concern, dipped the corner of her bib into her glass of water, and stooping down from her high chair, tried to apply it to the discolored member.

"Oho!" broke in Joe, with a half-suppressed guffaw. "Got to go round two or three days with a pug like that, has she? Serves her right though—Polly Pry!"

Whereupon his father invited him unequivocally to leave the room at once.

"As for you, Jem," he said, turning sternly toward the still sobbing culprit; but Uncle Harry checked him with a hand laid upon his arm.

"Don't say anything more about it, please," he begged. "The poor little child has paid dearly enough for what after all, was nothing so dreadful. Let her run away to bed. I suppose," he added, as Jocelyn availed herself of the suggestion to lead the weeping child away, "I suppose old fellow, we all of us have some bump or other that is too big for our own good, and curiosity is not the worst of them by any means. Heredity, you know. Who knows but there may be an old bewigged ancestor away back in the Jerome family who was possessed of an inordinate desire to know everything about everything? The sins of the fathers, you know—"



“Yes, yes, I know,” rejoined Jem’s father, too deeply disturbed to be able to take the matter in a bantering way; “I try to make all due allowances with the children; I know parents have their shortcomings also; but it would be a pretty state of affairs in this world if we bolstered ourselves up with that notion of heredity and made no effort to correct our faults or build up our own character. That poor youngster has been beset by an inordinate curiosity all her days, but one would think she has had lessons enough to have cured her before now. Well—she will be getting the hardest one of all, perhaps, this time. Of course this business puts out of the question all thoughts of her being the one to go home with you. I shouldn’t think of trusting her away from home, in another person’s family. No one knows what she might be up to; I shouldn’t know a moment’s peace.”

“Why—is that so—do you feel that way?” said Uncle Harry, doubtfully. “And I like the little thing too,—she is so, so natural. Well! I don’t know but the quiet one after all, is the best choice for a convalescent’s room: but don’t rub it into poor little Jem—don’t let her know that she has missed anything, eh?”

But Mr. Jerome would not give him any



promise to this effect, and the unfortunate subject was dropped.

Up-stairs however, in the children's room, it was still in violent agitation, Jem had broken away from Jocelyn at her door, and rushing up to her own room in a whirlwind of shame and mortification, had dashed to the basin and plunged the offending feature of her poor little tear-swollen face into the water, subjecting it afterward to a most vigorous discipline with soap and towel. All in vain, however; the little uptilted tip remained persistently black, and another passionate fit of crying followed. When Janet, setting up in her bed, succeeded at last in discovering what was the trouble, she was filled with consternation, and her involuntary outcry did not improve matters.

"O Jem, Jem!" she broke out pitifully. "Now you have done it for yourself—now you have spoiled all your chances! Oh dear! isn't it too bad!"

"Done what for myself? Spoiled what chances?" demanded Jem, but Janet remembered herself and gave only an evasive answer.

"Oh, of having Uncle Harry think well of you, of course;" and she lay awake, thinking and planning, long after the little curly-headed figure beside her had cried itself to sleep.

The next morning, as she sat in a corner of



the piazza with a book, not reading, but pondering how she could contrive to get a word with Uncle Harry alone, the gentleman himself came around the side of the house, returning from a walk to the office with his host, and stopping at sight of her, leaned over the railing and began speaking to her on the very subject which she wished yet dreaded to introduce.

“Well, Mousie,” he said, pulling one of her long braids of hair; “here you are just as I came looking for you. Do you know I’ve got a great favor to ask of you. My little midge—I told you about her unlucky little foot—well, she is going to have a dull time of it while it is getting well, and she sent me off down here expressly to bring one of you cousins back with me to keep her from being bored to death. Now you seem to me just the dear, quiet little woman to make the sweetest sort of a companion to a little lame girl, who’s sure to be cross—and if you would—we shouldn’t keep you a prisoner all the time—we should try to make things pleasant for you. Well, I should be very much obliged indeed, and so would Nan and her mother. Now how does the idea strike you? Think you’d like a trip to Washington with Uncle Harry—eh?”

Janet’s heart gave a leap within her: would



she like it, indeed? But she made a little silent prayer within herself, and resolutely put aside all thought of self. She got up and came and stood in front of Uncle Harry, all in a glow and a tremble, scarcely able to speak for timidity, yet so sincerely in earnest:

"Oh, take Jem, please, Uncle Harry!" she begged. "She'd be a great deal better company for Nan than I, she's so full of life and fun, and she's the best-hearted little thing! You mustn't mind about what she did yesterday, Uncle Harry. She don't do that sort of thing very often nowadays, and I'm sure it'll be a long time before she forgets again!"

"Well—but don't you think you'd like it yourself, then?" asked Uncle Harry, in some surprise.

"Like it? Why, who could help liking it? It would be just lovely, of course, but I'd rather Jem had it. I don't feel as if I deserved it anyhow," and here the sweet, earnest face was covered with a deep blush. "I knew about it already, Uncle Harry, I heard you asking father about it yesterday morning. You'd been walking round the yard, and you stopped right under the window where I was lying almost asleep. I didn't *mean* to listen; it seemed as if I heard the voices in a dream, and before I fairly knew, you had told what you wanted. And I



was awful glad for a minute that I knew before Jem did, because I wanted to go so much, and I was the oldest! But the next minute I knew I couldn't be so mean—that I wanted Jem to have just as fair a chance as myself; and I wanted to go straight and tell you. But my head was so bad, that Jocelyn made me go to bed. And then poor little Jem got into such trouble; I'm so sorry for her! And I came out here to see you when you came back, and to beg you to take her. She'll be good—I'm sure of that—and you will, won't you, Uncle Harry?"

But Uncle Harry put his two hands on each side of the sweet glowing face, and bent down and kissed it.

"You are a dear, honorable, unselfish little girl!" he said. "And just the kind of friend I would choose for my daughter if I had any longer any choice in the matter. But I have not, my dear: your father was so disturbed at poor little Jem's performance yesterday that he said quite decidedly all thought of her going must be given up—he could not trust her away from home. So though we are sorry for her, don't let it spoil our own pleasure, since we can't help her. Her turn shall come another time, when she is a little older and wiser. But now we must go at once to the mother-sister,



and tell her we are going to steal one of her brood away. For, of course, there'll be something to be attended to, and now that my commission has settled itself, I must get back home to my invalid just as quick as I can. Come!"

And Janet followed him slowly into the house. She could not *help* but be glad she was going, but she did wish Jem was going too!



## CHAPTER XI.

### HELP IN TIME OF NEED.

THERE was a great flutter in the Jaybirds' Nest when it was announced that one of the fledglings was about to try her wings under new and strange skies. Juliet, whose secret desire to know something of the life of cities had been fed by the glittering representations of her quondam friend, Clara Pickett, and who felt it more her right as the elder, had to struggle hard with herself before she could put any warmth in her congratulations to Janet; and Jem received the news with an outburst of indignation.

"There! I knew there was something," she cried, turning upon her luckier sister with sparkling eyes. "That was what you meant then, was it, when you said I had done for myself, and had lost my chances! What chance did I have? Did Uncle Harry mean to take me too? And did he give it up for just such a little thing as this?" giving her nose a vicious little dab. "Because if he did, I think it's just the *meanest*——"



"Hush Jem!" interposed Jocelyn with authority. "You must not speak in that way of Uncle Harry, and besides, it is not his doing at all. It was father who said at once that he could not think of letting you go; he could not trust you in other people's houses. I'm awfully sorry, Jem," she added pityingly, as she saw the child's look fall; "but oh, why *will* you keep on doing such things?"

Jem's funny little black-nosed face was working strangely: she was saying to herself with a sense of shame and pain she had never known before, "*Father* afraid to trust me in other people's houses—just as if I were a thief!" and the thought was very hard to bear. "Well! he shall soon give over thinking *that* of me," she decided promptly in her rapid little mind. "I never, never, *never* will again—and may the Lord help me!"

With the little inward prayer the tears started to the childish blue eyes; Jocelyn and Janet exchanged pitiful glances, and Janet came up to her and said pleadingly,

"Don't feel so badly about it, please Jem; you make me feel as if it was mean in me to go. Your turn will come by and by; Uncle Harry said so."

But sturdy little Jem was not going to be miserable.



"Oh, I don't mind it so much after all," she said. "I'm sure I'm glad you're going, since you think you'll enjoy it so much, Janet. As for me, I have good enough times right here, at home and at school; and I'm not sure I should fancy being shut up so much in a sick room entertaining Miss Nan. I guess she's pretty spoiled anyhow; I thought she was tol'erable 'primmy and mincy' that time she was down here."

Janet felt very much relieved. "Well no, I guess she isn't so very 'primpy and mincy,' whatever you mean by that, Jem," she said, laughing. "I guess she's only quiet, like myself: I won't mind staying in with her, but maybe you will have a better time home, just as you say. I'm so glad you don't really mind!"

"There's Uncle Harry calling us now!" was Jem's rather irrelevant reply. "He's going to take more pictures. Well, I shall chalk my nose, and then it won't show. Come along—aren't the rest of you coming?"

But Jocelyn had to stay up-stairs, and look over Janet's wardrobe, and see what was needed to be done before starting the little woman off on a long visit. There were no new things to be undertaken; there was no time for that, and besides, Uncle Harry declared it was not necessary at all.



“You know poor little Nan can’t use any new toggery this fall,” he said; “and I don’t know how her mother could get along without a live doll to dress. There are plenty of shops where every thing can be bought, and a seamstress is at the house pretty much all the time besides; and I insist upon it, Jocelyn, that you shan’t be bothered with any preparations. It is quite enough for you to spare me one of your brood, —I’ll see to the feathers!”

There were a good many stitches, notwithstanding, to be taken here and there, some fine laundering to be done, and considerable looking around and gathering together, before the packing began—that most important epoch in one’s life when one’s trunk is packed for the first time all for one’s own self! Juliet had been able to put aside the thought of her own wishes sufficiently to lend a helping hand with a good grace. She and Jocelyn sewed comfortably together in “mother’s room” over the new facings and braids, and when the last goodbyes had been said, the last handkerchiefs waved, and they had gone back into the house, they found themselves missing the shy, silent, gentle little girl more than they would have thought likely.

Juliet, of course, had her school to go back to; and the coming and going in company with her mates, the small but interesting events of



the class-room, her studies, her music, all served to keep her busy and contented. In the afternoons and evenings, there were always some of her young friends dropping in; Douglas Pryor had taken pains to bring forward the fact of his relationship to establish a sort of at-homeness in the house, and Juliet, and even Joe and Jem were growing into the habit of giving him the old place of familiar friend which had formally been held by "our Dick."

Only Jocelyn's heart was faithful to the absent one who had vanished so suddenly out of their lives; and her thoughts went constantly forth over land and sea to the wanderer during all these long months of parting and distance. But thoughts, however tender, and even letters, which for the sake of others must come not too often, and be so impersonal when they did come, were but sorry substitutes for the pleasant intercourse to which she had been accustomed all her life; the friendly companionship, the affectionate interest, the ready service—the something dearer yet, and sweeter than all these, of which she had had such a brief, imperfect taste.

Despite her conscientious efforts toward patience and cheerfulness, she found herself growing dull and dispirited, as the long slow autumn died into winter, and the days grew shorter,



darker, sadder. She could not help the feeling that her position in life was hard to fill happily because an anomalous one. Other girls of her age—she was barely nineteen—had nothing to do but to be young and happy; to busy themselves, of course, in all manner of young lady ways, but still, to be only girls, with only a girl's duties and responsibilities, which left plenty of time and spirit for the pleasures, the amusements, the "good times" which are apt to come in a girl's way.

But upon her young shoulders a double weight of obligations had been laid; she had been called to be a woman as well as a girl, mother as well as sister, the companion of her father, the mistress of the house; and the double set of duties were of necessity often in conflict. Her young friends grew discouraged after a while in their attempts to keep her in her old place in their circle, when on coming to ask her to do this or that, or to come with them here or there, or join them in one or another of the old social undertakings, when the answer so often met them: "I am so sorry, but I really cannot to-day. My father is not well, and I can't leave him; or, the others are all out, and there is no one to look after Jessie; or, it is house-cleaning, or pickling, or preserving time; or, there is company expected to dinner, and I



am obliged to be at home; or, only see that pile of mending which has got to be done!

"It is too bad," the girls would say, going out of the house after some such ineffectual errand, with a disappointed look upon their care-free young faces; "but that poor thing is completely tied down to that big family. We might as well leave off worrying her, asking her to do things which she really cannot."

So by degrees, it seemed to Jocelyn that the circle of her pleasures was narrowing all the time, while that of her duties was increasing. She could not bring herself to consent to give up her class in Sunday-school, nor her post as secretary of the Young People's Association, nor her visits to certain poor people who counted her as their best friend. And to make time for these pious tasks, in addition to her daily household duties, she must relinquish the pleasant walks and talks, the social gatherings, the frequent interchange of visits, the thousand "airy nothings" that fill up the lives of most girls for the brief period of joyous youth.

She did her best, our good Jocelyn, to make herself content with her lot; to put aside self, and live for those whom the great Father had entrusted to her keeping; to keep her own spirit serene and bright so that she might preserve the atmosphere of the house, one of



"sweetness and light." But she found it more and more difficult as the winter advanced cold, dark, and stormy. The care of little Jessie, who was too delicate to go to school, all through the long, dull, and yet busy days, the effort to keep her amused and happy, wore upon her spirits: the wet weather made Aunt Peggy's "rheumatiz" bad, and affected her temper correspondingly; there were constant disagreements to settle between her and Mahaly; but the afternoons were the worst of all, and Jocelyn really came to dread the hour of return from school.

It rained so almost incessantly that the children could scarcely be out of doors at all. Janet had not yet returned from Washington, where her letters told of no end of delightful happenings. Jem was thus thrown upon Joe for companionship; Jessie, tired of her long day with only "grown-ups," would want to join them. They would all come tumbling in upon Jocelyn as she sat by the fire with her sewing in the big old family sitting-room; and their advent was the signal for the vanishing of all peace and quiet.

Tired themselves of the enforced order of the school-room, they desired to revel in liberty to their hearts' content; to make as much noise as they liked: to devour bread and jam, crack



walnuts, make molasses taffy; play "jacks," chase each other round the room, shout, laugh, tease, and even quarrel, by way of a change, as is the manner with half-grown brothers and sisters, the world over. And Jocelyn, remembering that young things will be young things, and trying to be a mother to them, would put up with the confusion and "hullabaloo" as long as she could; then would become dignified and authoritative, and insist upon its being moderated; then would lay aside her work and give herself up to the task of arranging more peaceable amusements; play games with them, tell stories, cover balls, make bags for marbles, turn from one thing to another, thankful if she could only keep them good-tempered and happy, so that her father, coming in from his long, perhaps arduous work at the office, should not find discomfort and discontent in his home.

She did her best, but it was a great strain upon nerves and spirits, and even temper began to give way under the steady wear and tear, so that more than once her pillow was wet with tears at night because some one had said she was "cross," and she could not but feel that it was true!

One day everything seemed to culminate in one of those domestic crises that will occur "in the best regulated families." Aunt Peggy was



sick ; breakfast late ; the children worried and hurried in getting off to school ; her father with a resigned look, making his way out of the house as speedily as he could, and little Jessie, feeling as a child always does, the discomfort in the atmosphere, fretful and exacting beyond her wont. Jocelyn went about from room to room, attending to Mahaly's duties so that she might take the cook's place in the kitchen ; her little sister followed at her heels, nagging, complaining that her head ached, her doll was broken, her kitten had scratched her ; nobody loved her, and she wished, oh, she wished her 'mo'ver' hadn't gone away and left her all alone in the world !

Poor Jocelyn ! how she wished it too ! How all her vexed young soul was crying out for

“The touch of a vanished hand,  
And the sound of a voice that is still !”

She kept herself under control as long as she could, but by the time lunch was over, the house in order, a tiresome visitor departed, and the hour at hand when Joe and Jem would come rushing home with their thousand and one demands upon her, she was so tired and nervous that she felt as though flesh and heart were failing.

“I just *cannot* stand it this afternoon !” she



cried to herself, glancing at the clock with a sort of haunted look: "it's going to rain again—they will have to stay in the house; I feel as if it would drive me crazy to have to be shut up with them till dinner-time! The wildest storm would be better than that, and I am going out, come what may. I suppose if they really begin to pull the house down about her ears, Juliet will condescend to come to the rescue."

"She never does," she went on bitterly, as she tied on her bonnet and buttoned her coat with fingers trembling with nervous hurry. "She just walks straight up to her own room every single day, and makes herself comfortable, reading her books, writing her letters, fixing her own pretty things, and never gives a thought or a care to poor me, worrying downstairs with those noisy children. I don't see how she can be so selfish; but this one afternoon anyhow, I am going to leave them all to their own devices!"

"Why, where are you going, Dottelyn? Take me wif you," pleaded Jessie, meeting her in the hall with a hot "sugar-cake" in her hand which Mahaly had just given her.

"I can't. It's going to rain; go play party with your dolls; I'll be back by-and-bye," Jocelyn answered briefly, and hurried out of



the door, like one escaping, leaving the little girl standing dumb with surprise at the suddenness of her departure.

“Dottelyn’s went away and never kissed me good-by!” she wailed to the colored girl as soon as she could find voice; but Jocelyn did not hear nor heed her; for once she had determined to take unto herself wings as of the wind, and fly whithersoever she listed!

She walked rapidly along with a sort of reckless energy, heedless of the great rain-drops that were beginning to fall, and turning into huge snow-flakes as they came scurrying to the ground. She did not know or care where she was going; she was conscious only of a blissful sense of freedom, of a wild exhilarating pleasure in drawing in long full breaths of the keen fresh wind, and battling her way through the fast whitening storm. Up one street, and down another, she marched with a sort of resolute haste, not even seeing the many wondering smiles and nods that greeted her from various windows as she hurried past; neither knowing or caring where she was going, thinking nothing, feeling nothing, except the stinging, invigorating thrill of being out of the house—alone—in the wind and the storm, with which her spirit just now seemed in harmony!

She came to herself suddenly with a start,



finding herself astray in a narrow, unpaved street, quite on the outskirts of the town, leading down to the waterside, and terminating in the only factory Oakleigh possessed—the first fruits of the “new South.” It was, like most of its class, a huge, unpainted, barrack-like structure, through whose dingy windows the buzz and whirr of many machines—human and otherwise—were indistinctly audible: on either side of the squalid roadway stood huddled together the mean little houses of the mill-hands, with here and there a group of dirty unkempt children trying to scrape up enough of the muddy snow to make balls wherewith to pelt each other; and at door and window slatternly women came to stare at the strange spectacle of a “town-lady” in the purlieus of Mill-alley.

Jocelyn recovered her senses sufficiently at sight of her unpleasant surroundings, to realize that it must be nearly time for the close of work, and the whole tide of operatives, men, women, and children, might at any moment come pouring down the street. They were not pleasant folks to meet, some of them, she conjectured; but she felt a strange reluctance toward going home as yet, and merely retracing her steps to the head of the alley, she struck out on the lonely turnpike where she would be



sure of meeting nothing but the whistling wind and the snow-flakes whirling and wheeling in its train.

She walked hard and fast, still revelling in the keen excitement of the weather, but presently, there came to her ear, amid the piping of the blast, the muffled tone of a bell, feeling its way to her through the thickening snowfall, as though to summon her back out of the storm and the darkness that would soon begin to gather.

"That must be the factory-bell now," she said to herself. "I didn't know it rang at closing. By the time I can get back to the town the people will all be scattered to their homes, and I suppose it is high time I was getting back to mine, heigho! I wonder anyhow, what my father, what *Dick*, would say to my wandering about this wild way in a snow squall!"

She turned about, half-frightened herself at the thought, and made her way back as swiftly as she could, feeling a certain strange comfort in the friendly gleam of the lights through the white shower, and the summoning sound of the bell, which oddly enough, continued to ring, and which seemed to her like a call. Its rather flat, tinkling peal kept up till she had entered the town again, crossed Mill-alley, which was empty, as she had thought likely, of all but one



or two stragglers, loitering to gossip, and turned into a cleaner and more decent street above. There it came to a stop, but not before she had traced its sound to the little wooden steeple of a small plain church, or meeting-house, from whose narrow windows lights were streaming out as if in kindly invitation to come in. It was some two or three blocks away, down at the foot of the street, and Jocelyn was thinking that she ought to go home; but, urged by an impulse which she could not resist, she turned her steps in that direction, and walked slowly and hesitatingly down the street. While she still lingered, irresolute, on the opposite sidewalk, there suddenly broke forth through the dimness of the twilight and the snow, the notes of a hymn which struck upon Jocelyn's ear like the call of a remembered voice. She listened for a moment, holding her breath: the wild and plaintive strain sent a thrill to her heart, and brought the tears to her eyes.

“ Jesus lover of my soul,  
Let me to thy bosom fly,  
While the waves of trouble roll,  
While the tempest still is high—”

“ Yes, it is my mother's favorite hymn, and the tune she used to sing it to. Oh, I must go in ! ”



And hesitating no longer, Jocelyn crossed the street, went up the little wooden steps, and entered at the low swinging door.

It was a very small and humble temple in which she found herself: uncarpeted aisle, unpainted benches, kerosene lamps, by whose dim glare she descried the toil-worn and weather-beaten faces of the scattered congregation, mill-hands, she conjectured they were mostly; rough-looking, down-faced men; homely women, with tired, and some with anxious, or saddened eyes; here and there a girl, young as herself, from whose cheeks the roses had not yet faded, nor the laughter out of their looks, and showing their youth by a bit of cheap "artificials" in their bonnets, or a gaudy ring upon their coarse, ungloved hands. But all were decent in their appearance, devout in their behavior; and singing the dear old words of her mother's hymn to her mother's tune, as earnestly and reverently, though with many an extraneous quake and quaver, as she could have done herself.

They took no special notice of her entrance; one after another new-comer kept dropping in from time to time; they were standing as they were singing, and singing with all their heart; and Jocelyn quietly slipped into an unoccupied pew, and lifted up her voice and her heart in unison with them. The minister stood up be-



fore them upon a low platform of unpainted pine: a young man, one of "the people," like themselves, but with an earnest face, and a singularly sincere and sympathetic voice. After the hymn was ended, which he led in a full deep baritone voice, he spoke a few words of exhortation, counsel, comfort; just what Jocelyn thought must go straight to the hearts of such listeners as those before him, and which stirred her own with strange unexpected power. Afterward he prayed; and he seemed to divine all the most real and secret wants and troubles, hopes, and fears, and sorrows, ayè, and joys, of those humble, but very human souls, and bear them to the feet of God as though they were his own. That they voiced the inmost cry of the heart was shown by the frequent low amens, that sounded out here and there among the kneeling assembly, and Jocelyn felt awed, and pondered, more than once,

"It is just what I would have asked for myself!" When the prayer was ended, they sang again, rising from their knees, and standing reverently; and again the hymn was one that Jocelyn loved:

"Jesus, my Saviour, look on me,  
For I am weary and oppress'd;  
I come to cast myself on Thee:  
Thou art my Rest."



She did not need the dusty little hymn book which lay on the bench beside her; every line of the tender, impassioned strain was familiar to her, and she sang it through with a fervor of feeling, a sense of her own share in that "Life," that "Light," that "Peace," which had not visited her tired and discouraged soul for many days.

The service was very short; a brief prayer from one or two of the gray-haired, rugged men among the audience; another sweet old-fashioned hymn, set in a more joyous key to send them home happy and uplifted—

"His loving kindness, oh how free!"

a word of benediction, and it was over. The scanty congregation was scattered; the lights put out, the door locked, and Jocelyn herself was hurrying homeward along the darkening streets as rapidly as she could go.

But with what a different feeling in her heart from that with which she had left the house two hours ago! What a new sweet sense of comfort; of the nearness and *realness* of that Friend who is "a very present help in time of trouble"; what regret and compunction for her own impatience, and weariness of duty!

"What are my tasks, my trials, compared to theirs?" she asked herself, reproachfully.



“How tired and joyless, and yet how resigned, some of those faces looked! What a blessing it must be to them to have that dear little half-way house to stop and forget about their troubles for awhile and rest themselves, soul and body, between that great noisy mill and their own bare homes! I remember now hearing about it; that little chapel where a daily prayer-meeting had been started at five o’clock to catch them, those who would come, on their way home from the factory. Bethel, I think they call it, and indeed it must seem like the very gate of heaven to some of them; the quiet and the rest, and the letting their dumb souls out in the hymns, and that young man’s earnest, *genuine* way of speaking to them. I know it has helped me to-day, in just the way I needed to be helped. I wish I could go every day—oh, how I wish it! That little peaceful half hour of prayer and praise at the close of the day—what a boon it would be! And if only Juliet would—but there, I must not even think of it. Let me be thankful for what I have had already——”

And she opened the gate and hastened up the snowy path to her own home, wondering a little anxiously what state of things she should find therein.

There were still a few minutes wanting of



six, and the absence of her father's coat and hat in the hall showed that he had not yet come in. None of the children were about, but a cheerful hum of voices sounded from the sitting-room, and Jocelyn, opening the door quietly, found herself in the presence of as cosy and comfortable a home scene as heart could desire.

The lamps were not yet lighted, but a great fire of oak and pine blazed merrily upon the hearth; Joe was stretched out, boy-fashion, on the rug in front of it. Juliet sat in the big easy-chair with Jessie on her lap; Jem was on an ottoman close by, and there seemed to be an animated conversation going on on the subject of, "Darkest Africa," the great volume which Joe had propped open before him, and was looking over by the light of the blazing pine-knots.

It came to a sudden stop as Jocelyn appeared, and Jem cried out, "Why where have you been? We've been having such a nice time!"

"I thought you wasn't *ever* coming back," complained Jessie, but she made no movement to leave her comfortable perch on her other sister's knee; and Jocelyn felt with a sense of great relief that her absence had made no special difference for once at least. So she only made some laughing salutation, and hastened



up-stairs to take off her wraps, smooth her hair, and be down again to see that the tea-table was just as it should be, and make due inquiries for Aunt Peggy's rheumatism.

That night as they were all going up to bed, Jocelyn drew Juliet for a moment into her own room.

"I just wanted to give you a kiss, dear, for keeping the children happy this afternoon," she said. "I got into a sort of tired and nervous fit, and just longed to get out into the air; but I didn't mean to stay so long."

"There is no reason why you shouldn't go every day, if you want to," said Juliet, with a little constraint in her tone. "I should think you would get tired looking after everything so. I am perfectly willing to come down and spend the hour before dinner with the children; I don't mind their noise; I haven't any nerves, and I'm used to it at school. I would have offered before, only I did not wish to intrude. I know you are the eldest, and in the mother's place; and I supposed you preferred to keep everything in your own hands."



## CHAPTER XII.

### JOE'S SAD ESCAPE.

A LOOK of hurt surprise took the place of the soft grateful warmth in Jocelyn's face.

"Did you think so poorly of me then, Juliet?" she asked in a reproachful tone; and then, seeing that her sister only looked at her uneasily, but seemed unable to withdraw her words, she added, after a moment's inward struggle,

"Well, never mind. I suppose I must have given you some reason, though indeed I never meant to. And I have misjudged you too; I thought you were so absorbed in your own affairs you did not care to help me. We have each done the other an injustice; but we won't do it any more, will we? we will understand each other better after this."

Her heart was so full, so softened, with all she had been doing and feeling that day, she longed to be able to pour it out into a sympathetic ear; she would be glad to put her arms about her sister's neck and seal the compact with a kiss. But it was not Juliet's way to be demonstra-



tive, and she stood quite still while she said gravely,

"I should certainly be very sorry to misunderstand you, Jocelyn: I am sorry if I have. And of course, I am perfectly willing to help you in any way I can. Only tell me what you would like me to do."

"Well—" hesitated Jocelyn; "if it really would not be any trouble to you—if you could spare the hour before dinner two or three times a week—of course, I would not let you impose it upon yourself every day—to look after the children, and see that things are comfortable when father comes home, it would be a very great help to me, and I should be very much obliged to you. A little walk at that time rests me so, and—"

"You needn't say anything more about it," said Juliet. "I shall like, as I said before, to have something more to do with the children and father too. You can tell me whenever you feel like going, and I will be at your service. Good night."

"Good night, and thank you, dear,—" said Jocelyn, affectionately; and then she went on to herself;

"See now, how we have each been misjudging the other in these naughty hearts of ours. Oh, for the love that 'thinketh no evil'! I suppose



I really have not thought as I ought that it might not be altogether pleasant for Juliet to see a sister so near her own age invested with power and authority in the house, while she still remained like a child; and worse than that, I have taken it for granted that she was selfish and didn't want to be bothered. Well; all that must be changed now. I'm so glad I spoke to her to-night; that's one good that has come out of my little Bethel already. How thankful I am that the way is made plain for me to go there again, often. It will be such a comfort, such a help; and I will make it up to Juliet in some way. How good it was of her! I only wish she would care a little more about loving me, and letting me love her. Perhaps she will now!"

And as the days and weeks passed on she found this hope gradually realizing itself. Her own mind and temper came by degrees back to their normal comfortable state when relieved of a portion of the care, the responsibility, the fatiguing monotony of her life. The mere looking forward to that quiet half hour spent in that humble little place of worship; the earnest words she heard spoken, the prayers in which she too had a share, the sweet, old-fashioned hymns, in which, more than through any other channel, she had always been able to lift



up her heart to God, were an influence for good all through the varied tasks and trials of the day, and made its gracious effect felt in the home-atmosphere.

"You's my own Dottelyn again," said Jessie in her whimsical fashion one day. "All we Jay-birds are very nice; Jem and Joe, and me, and Juliet; she's a whole heap nicer than she used to be; she comes and sits down with the rest of us all the time, now, don't she, and I like to have you and her both together sewin' an' talkin' here in mother's room. Yes, she's awful nice—but you are the very nicest of all, Dottelyn!"

"Well! I like that! I don't see where I come in there!" cried a gay voice suddenly, as the colonnade door was pushed open, and a familiar figure appeared laughingly on the threshold. And while Jocelyn sprang forward with a "Why, *Janet!*" and Jessie repeated after her "why, Janet!" the little girl laughed and said amid the kisses,

"Oh yes, that's all very nice; 'why, *Janet!*' as if you were glad to see me. But I've been standing, peeping and listening more than a minute at the door, and all I heard was that Jem and Joe and Juliet and Jocelyn were nice; I didn't hear anything about poor little Janet, way off in Washington, Miss Jessie!"



"But you ain't way off in Washin'ton any more; you's right here, an' I'm so glad!" cried Jessie, jumping about with pleasure: and Jocelyn said, "Yes, indeed; I guess we are glad to have our little astray come safe back home again. But why didn't you let us know? And who came with you, and where are they all this while?"

"Oh, there isn't anybody, only just me!" cried Janet, gaily. "You see I had stayed long anyhow, and Nan's ankle was well pretty near a month ago. I was having a *lovely* time, you know, but I was beginning to get pretty homesick—I did want to see all the J. J's. again so bad! And Mr. and Mrs. Lancaster, they're friends of Uncle Harry, they were coming down in the boat, and going on to the next landing to see her mother, who lives there; and we didn't know anything about it till they came in yesterday morning to say good-by. And then I just felt I *had* to come too! And I coaxed Nan not to mind. They all helped me to pack my trunk; and off I started at a minute's notice. And the Carrs were down at the dock with their carriage to meet somebody, and they just tucked me in—I wouldn't have minded walking a bit! And they drooped me at the gate, and here I am, and oh, so glad! And I



don't see how I can wait till afternoon to see father and all the rest of the folks!"

"Well, well!" said Jocelyn, looking at her little sister with beaming eyes. "What a good idea that was! And how tall we've grown, and how stylish we look,—"

"An' how fast she talks, don't she?" put in Jessie, a little doubtfully. "Mos' jus' like Jem, ain't it, Dottelyn?"

"Oh! Don't give you a chance to put a word in, do I?" laughed Janet. "Oh well, you see, I've got so much lost time to make up for! But here's something to put right in your little mouth, Jessie, to comfort you," and she drew out a paper of caramels from her bag and put them into the eager little hands. "Now you won't mind my talking, will you, for oh, I've got so much to tell!" And sooth to say, the little girl's tongue rattled on all through that first joyous day of the home-coming in a way that seemed strange indeed and new for shy, quiet Janet. There was indeed so much to tell that could not be put into letters, both of the home life at Uncle Harry's beautiful mansion, and of the many delightful outside interests; and all the eager history she poured out to Jocelyn during the morning had to be repeated when the young folks came from school in the afternoon, and was gone over again, a good



deal of it, for the third time, for her father's benefit in the evening. Jem was most interested to know all about her Cousin Nannie, how she looked, what she said, how she talked, what sort of a girl she was anyhow, nowadays, and in her own home. Did Janet really like her; was she nice and pleasant and not stuck up; and would it be nice to have her come on to Oakleigh and make them a visit?

"Yes; she was nice, very nice; Janet did like her; so would Jem, and all of them; and she was coming on, she and Aunt Emily, her mother, both of them sometime in the summer, after vacation began."

This quieted Jem for awhile, but Joe wanted to know about the city itself; was it really so beautiful, and had she actually been inside the Capitol, and the President's house, and all that sort of thing?

"Oh yes indeed! Washington *was* just as lovely as it could be! Such great broad streets, and odd-looking, elegant houses, and dear little parks everywhere, where the grass was green even in the winter-time. And she had been taken everywhere; she had been all over the Capitol, and listened to the great men speak who 'made the laws,' as the geography said; only, of course, she couldn't understand them very well. But she had seen all the big pic-



tures in the rotunda, that were about the things they studied in history; and she had seen the glorious view from the terrace, and climbed up to the top of the dome, so high, so high it made her dizzy even to think of it. And she had been higher up in the world still, away up to the top of Washington's monument, only there she had been carried up in a car they called an elevator—and oh, she should never forget how it made her feel! And she had been driven all through the beautiful grounds of The Soldiers' Home, and over the river to Arlington—oh, the loveliest, sweetest, peace-fullest place! She had been all through the grand old mansion; had stood on the portico with its big yellow pillars, and looked out all over the city and the Heights of Georgetown, and up and down the blue Potomac; and then driven in and out among the winding roads, where everywhere in the shadow of the beautiful old trees, the nation's dead were sleeping.

Janet waxed quite eloquent in describing this historic spot, and even more so in telling of her delightful visit to Mount Vernon; the charming sail down the river on the mild winter's day that was almost like Indian summer; the quaint old mansion, and the tomb, at which every one she thought, must feel like saying their prayers. Then there were the picture-



galleries—"O, Juliet, you love pictures so, you ought to see all the splendid paintings I saw, and the statues, though I didn't care so much about them. And Joe—if you could but go to the Smithsonian, and to the museum—oh, I couldn't tell you all there was to make it just delightful, no, not if I was to talk like this for a week! You must just wait till you go and see 'em yourselves!"

And Joe said, "Yes, and I mean to go too, one of these days, you bet; if I have to work hard and earn the money myself!" while Juliet, more interested in the social side of the charming city, thought how delightful it would be to "come out" there next winter, under the auspices of a society woman like her aunt; to have a stylish new suit and go about making calls with her in a coupé, assisting at "afternoon teas" and evening receptions, and getting a glimpse of a wider world than the narrow little one of Oakleigh. Not that she didn't love her home, of course, but a winter in Washington must be so delightful! She was glad her aunt was coming to the Nest next summer; perhaps—who knows?—she might take a fancy to *her* and ask her to make them a long visit! Of course Jocelyn couldn't leave, and anyhow, she had been once; and Jem was too little, and



well ! it was something to look forward to as possible.

The reflection, as it were, of Janet's enjoyment, seemed to diffuse itself throughout all the family ; it gave fruitful theme for talk for days and weeks after she had returned, and the little girl herself seemed to have grown out of a great deal of the shyness and sensitiveness which had once stood in the way of her own enjoyment and that of others. She came to Jocelyn one evening, with just a little timid color in her cheek, and held out to her some loose sheets of paper covered with her childish handwriting.

"There was such a pretty house we used to pass sometimes," she said ; "it had a double bay-window, and under this the head of a man carved in the stone. It put a fancy in my head, and I wrote it out in a little story. Nan got hold of it and showed it to her mother, and Aunt Emily seemed to be very much pleased with it, and said I ought to be willing to share such a pleasure with my friends. So if you like, you may read it, too, Jocelyn."

"If I like ? Why, of course I shall like," said Jocelyn, heartily. "And may I read it aloud to father and the rest of them ?"

The color rather deepened in Janet's sweet little serious face at this, but she said—"Yes—



if you like—" and Jocelyn, promptly "calling the meeting to order," smoothed out the roll of manuscript and began :

#### THE MAN IN THE BAY WINDOW.

Everyone said so, and it was true : Helen was a thoughtful and queer child. She had notions in her head that no other children of her age, or even older people, would think of. But that did not keep her from being good. Good? Why, no other child in the family was as good as Helen, so Aunt Sara says, and Aunt Sara's ideas of "good" are pretty strict.

"She will set me crazy with her quare notions," says Dinah, "if she don't quit. For de land's sake, she come in de kitchen todder day, and says in dat drawly voice of hern, 'Dinah, hain't you got no pie?'"

'Yes, honey,' says I, 'and pray, what you want wid pie?'

'Nothing,' says she, 'only the old man who holds up the bay-window out front looks so tired an' hungry! 'Go long!' says I, and away she went, with such a sorrowful look on her face it mos' broke my heart!"

Meanwhile, what was Helen doing? Up in the third story of the great house was Helen's and her sister Kate's room. Kate was not like her sister Helen. Kate was sharp and wild



while Helen was the opposite in both. Kate was sitting in the window, twirling the fringe of a tidy, while Helen was sitting as far away from the window as she could get. Kate was the first to break the silence.

"I don't see why you want to stick at the other end of the room so far away from the light!"

Helen glanced at Kate with a meaning look, but she said nothing. When she had finished her work she went softly down the broad oak stairs, and through the large door, down in front of the bay-window.

Now this bay-window was a strange thing, for it seemed to be held up by a man of stone, and that was what brought Helen out such a cold day as this. Somehow, as she looked at it, she seemed to see in the face of stone a tired expression; so every day she would come out, and with her small hands hold or push up the bay-window, just as though she were taking the weight off the old man's shoulders. And every time she did it, she seemed to see a look of relief on the face of the stone man.

To-day, as she was performing this task, she noticed that the stone man began to smile vigorously, so she smiled back at him; but no sooner had the smile left her lips, than a frog leaped out of the deep carving of the window,



and gave three croaks : when, instead of a frog, there stood, dazzling with splendor, a lovely young princess, who was as beautiful as the sun's sister, Ripple. The stone man was instantly changed to a handsome prince, and freed from his heavy responsibility. The prince and princess took Helen by the hand and were going to take her to the palace. Helen rubbed her eyes; and lo, she was *sitting in her chair*, having fallen asleep over her darning!

Other children would have been disappointed that such a lovely thing was only a dream ; but Helen was always happy in her kind heart. She could never get over the inclination to hold up the bay-window, and never could she be induced to step inside of it, for fear of adding to the weight on the old man's shoulders.

And I think it is true, as Dinah says, " Helen is the queerest child on airth! "

" But she was an awfully sweet and cunning little child, for all that! " cried Jocelyn warmly, as she finished reading, and feeling her eyes grow moist with the quaintness and tenderness of the artless little story. " Don't you think that is a very pretty little idea, father, to come into our Janet's head, and that she has worked it up very nicely, for such a 'prentice hand? "

" Oh, nonsense! " interposed Joe in a chaff-



ing tone. "What stuff to be writing about, holding up a stone man, and giving him *pie*; fairy tales too, princes and princesses, and all that! Oh, bah!"

"Never mind, Master Joe," rejoined his father with emphasis. "Wiser men even than you, young sir, have found both pleasure and profit even in fairy tales; and there is often a very good lesson to be found in allegories, and that sort of thing. There is certainly a very good example of kindness of heart, of pity and sympathy, to be found in your sister's little story; and if we were all as ready to bear one another's burdens' as her little Helen was, this world would be quite a different place to live in. *I* confess to being very much pleased myself, to think my little girl has such sweet thoughts, and can express them so prettily—" and, while Joe looked abashed, and felt rather smaller than was his wont, Janet thrilled with pleasure as her father put his arm affectionately about her, and gave her a kiss of appreciation; and she thought eagerly, "Who knows? Perhaps some day *I* may *really* be an author, and write things which will truly go to people's hearts, and help them to be good!"

"But I must first learn to be a great deal better myself—" was the reflection that followed soberly, "and I shall try—by God's



help!" was the resolve which planted itself then, and grew up, and bore precious fruit thereafter, in the sincere and thoughtful young soul.

Janet's home-coming gave a pleasant change to the quiet of the household: it was a long time before all of her happy visit was told. "It's so nice; there's always something to talk about now!" said Jem; and affairs went on in a very good-tempered and comfortable way in the Nest nowadays, though the winter still lingered, and the weather was as persistently dull and wet as it had been before.

There came a time at length however, when the grey February skies lifted their clouds and gave place to pale but brightening gleams; when the sun actually shone—if dimly and fitfully by day, and the moon by night; and presently there came a breath of real vigorous winter again, and Jack Frost once more began to steal out and silver the grass, and to etch his marvelous pictures on the window panes, while the world slept, and enjoyed the snuggling under warm blankets.

The young people all exulted in the change; their spirits rose with the lifting clouds, and neither Jocelyn nor Juliet were called upon any more to provide indoor amusement, for everybody wanted to be out after the long con-



finement, to walk, to run, to play games, to do anything which would fill the stifled lungs with this free, crisp, invigorating air.

Joe, especially, being a boy, had felt more "housebound" than the others, and it seemed now almost as though he wished never to be under a roof again except for the necessary purposes of eating and sleeping! More than once he was late for supper, after being out all the afternoon; and when his father made decided objection to that, he would contrive to disappear for an hour or two in the course of the evening, and have only bluff answers for Jocelyn when she came anxiously to speak with him about it.

"Where have I been? Oh, nowhere; out by the gate with some of the boys; or down at the drug-store, where some of the fellows told me they were going to be. What's the use of bothering me with questions, Jocelyn? Why can't you leave a body in peace?"

"Because if I don't, father will, Joe," his sister would answer. "You know he won't have you out at night—you know he is right in not allowing you to be round those stores down town where all sorts of loafers, men, as well as boys, are free to congregate to smoke and chew, and talk all sorts of talk. If they are nice boys you want to be with, why don't you bring



them up here? You can have the dining-room to yourselves all the evening, if you like; I will keep the fire burning and the lamp lit, and you can be as free as you wish,"—

"Oh, free!" interrupted Joe in a tone of disgust. "Free, in a house, shut up in a room, when a fellow wants to be out, where there's something going on. A boy isn't like a parcel o' girls, with their everlasting crochet-work and embroidery and piano and novels; he's made to like to be off, here and there, with other fellows, and nobody bossing—"

"Well, then, you'll have to be satisfied with what you can get of that sort of thing between school-out and supper, Joe," said Jocelyn, speaking with more authority than usual. "I want to do all I can to make you happy; but I *know* there will be trouble with father when he comes to know of your going down town of nights. And I shall have to tell him, you know, Joe, little as I shall like to. Oh, I wish there was some *nice* place in this town for restless fellows like you to spend part of their evenings in! A gymnasium, a bowling-alley, a hall for games and entertainments, a reading-room and library." \*

"But there isn't, you know, so what's the use of talking?" Joe would growl, and go off

\* For some not having nice homes.—*Editor.*



up-stairs to bed and to sleep; while his sister would lie awake, her heart full of almost a mother's tender anxiety, and think over all manner of ways by which an interest might be aroused in the sleepy little town; and the fathers of boys moved to provide some better gathering-place for their sons as they began to grow up.

She went to her father about it on Joe's behalf, as she had gone to him about the boat last summer, and he met her in the same sympathetic and liberal spirit as he had done then.

"There ought to be something of the kind, yes," he said. "An ounce of prevention, as you say, my dear, is better than a pound of cure. There should be a branch of the Young Men's Christian Association in our town, with all proper appliances, not only for instruction, but for recreation and entertainment. Young people need those things I know, and I will think about the matter; I will take it in hand myself, and speak with some of the leading men about it. There is money enough, and need enough—and meanwhile, Jocelyn, you are a good girl, and I don't know what your father would do without you!"

Jocelyn was not inclined to rate herself so highly however, and could not help an anxious and discouraged feeling when she saw how all



her efforts seemed to fail to make her restless brother really contented in his home. She bespoke Juliet's help again in making the evenings pleasant to him after lessons were over; and that of her faithful friend, Douglas Pryor, as well; but Joe shrugged his boyish shoulders and pooh-poohed: "he had no use for a fellow that liked to hang round a girl and talk poetry!"

And Jocelyn could only keep herself in a state of readiness to be companionable when the youth condescended to accept her society; for the rest, she strove to content herself with the fact of his staying at home in obedience to his father's command, and took the matter in prayer to God, not only in the privacy of her own chamber, but in those quiet, twilight hours when she still sought the little Bethel, and prayed and sung, and found rest for her soul, within its humble walls.

One morning, while the frost was yet upon the ground, and one's warm bed would seem the most comfortable place in the world, Jocelyn, who had become a light sleeper since she had the responsibility of the household laid upon her, was roused from her slumbers by a sound which seemed like the cautious effort to open a door noiselessly. She started up in bed to listen, and distinctly heard the careful turn-



ing of the knob, followed by a stealthy step upon the stair, a creak, and a smothered exclamation; "What can it be? Some one entering the house at this hour?" she said to herself with a strange foreboding at her heart; and snatching a shawl from the foot of the bed, she threw it around her, sprang to her feet, and opened her door just in time to confront—Joe—upon the landing.

She stood for a moment gazing at him in speechless consternation. Even in the dim light of the early dawn he was a sorry spectacle: his face pale and haggard, though with red spots burning upon the cheeks, his eyes bloodshot and wild, his hair disordered, his clothes streaked with mud; and a faint, sickening odor hanging about him that told only too plainly the wretched fact—Joe—her brother, her *little* brother, a mere boy yet, mother's boy—*had been drinking*.

Stricken dumb with the shame, the horror of it, the sister could only gaze in speechless misery at the downcast, dogged face that dared not lift itself to hers; till presently, impatient of the delay, the boy pushed her roughly aside: "Get away, let me pass!" he muttered hoarsely. "I am tired; I want to go to bed."

Too faint to speak, almost to move, she leaned helplessly against the wall, while he



made his way past her, slouched heavily down the hall to his own little room, opened the door and shut it again; while Jocelyn, summoning all her powers of self-control, crept back to her own bed, and lay there, helpless, overwhelmed; crying under her breath.

"My heavenly Father! My heavenly Father!"

She lay there until the summons of the rising-bell, vigorously handled by Mahaly, warned her that it was time to make ready for breakfast; then she rose, tottering as if from a long illness, made her toilet, she scarce knew how, and smoothed her face as well as she could.

"The others must not know about this yet, no, not even father, until I have found out something about it and can break it to him as easily as possible;" and she tried to smile as usual, and busy herself with the table service, so as not to speak any more than was necessary, lest her voice should betray her. Jem's keen eyes were upon her more than once however, and it was Jem's quick tongue which broke out "Why where is Joe, the lazy fellow? He'll be late for school if he don't look out."

It cost an effort to answer quietly, "Joe doesn't feel very well this morning. He's got a bad headache, and I thought he had better lie still a little longer."

"Oh the idea! Why he was well enough



last night," cried the others in chorus; and Mr. Jerome said gravely "You mustn't coddle the boy too much, you know, Jocelyn; you had better send him to school unless he is really sick."

She said she would see, by and by, and waited in scarcely controllable nervousness, till the breakfast was all eaten, the lunch-baskets filled, and all had departed to the business of the day: then she poured out a cup of coffee, put a hot roll and an egg upon a little white-napkined tray, and bidding Jessie help Mahaly put away the china and not come up-stairs to disturb brother, she made her way with a strange slow step, a strange sick feeling, up to the boy's chamber. She stood at the door for a moment, dreading to enter, but hearing him tossing about and groaning, she opened the door, and closing it softly behind her, went in and sat down on the edge of the bed.

The boy turned over so as to hide his face from her, and muttered roughly,

"What did you come in for, waking me up? I don't want anything to eat; I want to go to sleep."

"But you were not asleep, Joe; I listened to see. And I think a cup of coffee will do you good. Come, you will sit up and drink it now, won't you, since I've brought it?"

The gentle tone, the kind manner, broke



down the lad's attempted hardness. "I don't see why you did bring it," he said, and there was a sob in his voice. "I don't see why you come near me at all, or do anything kind for me. I'm not fit for you even to speak to!" And he buried his head in the pillow, and the bed shook with his passion of crying.

Jocelyn set her tray down upon a table, and came and put her arms about her brother.

"Tell me about it, Joe," she said. "Let me know what has happened; what it all means."

He choked down his sobs as soon as he could, and suddenly throwing back the cover he had pulled over his head, he raised himself in the bed and met his sister's look for the first time.

"I will tell you about it," he said. "I am bad enough, but I don't want you to be thinking me worse than I am. I know you are smelling that beastly stuff; faugh! I feel as if I should never be clean of it again myself! But I didn't drink it knowingly; I never tasted a drop of anything of the kind before in my life. They made me swallow it; they said it was only ginger-tea, or something of that kind they had brought along to keep out the cold. And I was shivering so, that I couldn't keep up, and so I let them pour it down my throat. And it made me so sick—so deathly sick; it was some sort



of vile liquor, and they gave me so much before I got the taste. Oh you needn't think I haven't paid for what wrong I did; I have—I have!”

“But what, Joe?” urged Jocelyn, full of anxiety, and dread of she knew not what. “Who made you? Where were you? What have you been doing Joe, away from home, in the dead of the night?”

“Oh, nothing so dreadful in itself, don't be worried. Though of course I knew my father would never have let me go; and well was I served, for going against his will. You know what a stupid sort of a winter it has been; rain, rain, and stay in the house till a fellow was sick of it; and some of the boys, Jim Riley, and Will Holt, and a lot of the others, were just dying for some sort of lark after the weather did get decent. And Teke Holly and another colored man, they told us one day that they had tracked a coon in the woods, way up along the river; and they said they were going out some night with their dogs to try to tree him; and they said if we boys would each of us give them a half a dollar apiece they'd take us along, and show us a bit of real sport. So the other boys said it would be such high old fun, and that they'd go if I would; and I said I'd go if they would. And so we went. I didn't think it was any harm in itself, and I thought



fathers forgot how they felt when they were boys themselves. But don't look so, Jocelyn!"

Jocelyn was listening almost appalled. "Oh Joe! a *boy* like you, out all night, in the woods, with dogs, and those rough negro men,—"

She drew a long shuddering breath, and Joe shifted uneasily in the bed, and looked as miserable as she could wish him.

"I know," he said; "I know just how it seems to you, and I can just tell you it was worse than it seems. It's the last spree of that kind I'll ever go on, you may be sure of that! We tramped and tramped till I thought I should drop, though I'm not a baby at walking either. But the other boys were a good deal bigger and stronger than I am, and even they pretty near gave out, and still there wasn't any sign of a coon. And those negro fellows—they were just as low and rough as they could be. They talked so I was ashamed to hear them, and when I tried to stop them they made fun of me, or just told me right out to shut up!"

"Oh, the wretches!" interjected Jocelyn.

"And they got so mad when they could not track the coon that they beat the dogs, oh, dreadfully! And the poor creatures howled so, and ran about yelping through the trees—oh, it sounded so dismal, in the dead of the night, and all so dark, with only little bits of the



moon, and the black men's lanterns. And presently one of the dogs nosed out a hare-gum that somebody had set in the woods to catch the mollys. And there was one in it, a poor little thing, with such frightened-looking eyes, and the men tore it out of the trap, all trembling and struggling—”

“Oh, oh, Joe!” Jocelyn began to tremble herself, and put up her hands to her face as if to shut out the cruel spectacle.

“Yes, well of course, that's what all hunters have to do, and everybody goes for game when they can get it, you know. But I don't know; I never was 'round before when anything was killed, and it seemed to me they were so, so brutal, about it; and they laughed and joked and said they were in luck, and they were going to have a barbecue right then and there. And they tore off the pretty gray skin with their knives, and pitched the entrails to the dogs, and they fought and snarled over them. And then they made a fire out of sticks and bits of light wood, and began to roast the poor little thing while it was 'most alive still, it seemed to me; and oh, somehow, it was all so like cannibals, it just made me sick, Jocelyn; deathly sick. And the others made all sorts of sport of me, and declared it was airs, and that I should eat some of it. And I declared I wouldn't; for



besides everything else, it was stealing. And I got raging mad when they called me names, baby, and Miss Molly, and all that. I pulled away from them, and went and threw myself down on the ground a good way off; and I was so hot, and the frost was all on the shatters, and I got chilled, and began to shake and shake, and my teeth to chatter, chatter, as though they never would stop! And then one of the men took a bottle out of his pocket and gave it to Jim Riley. 'It's old Jamaikey,' he said, 'tell him it's Jamaikey ginger. I fatched it along to keep out the cold; make him take some.'

"So I thought it was some sort of ginger stuff we drink at home when we've got a cold, and I was so chilled to the very marrow, I put it to my lips, and Jim jounced it, so a great lot went down my throat before I got the taste of it. And then I knew they'd fooled me, and that made me so mad again, that I felt all on fire, and then I got awfully dizzy and queer. And I reckon Jim and Bill got scared, for they up and told the men they had to bring us straight home, or they wouldn't get a cent of money. So they did, and here I am, and a nice fellow to be sure!"

"Oh, oh Joe! You poor, wilful, misguided boy!" cried Jocelyn, almost overwhelmed. "What, *what* a story! But I'm glad it isn't so



bad as I feared. Oh Joe! when I met you there in the hall this morning, and saw that you had been—been—oh, I can't say the horrid word!—it seemed to me as though I wanted to drop right down there and never lift up my head any more!”

Joe put out his hand all trembling still, from under the cover, and put it on her shoulder as she sat leaning over him.

“Don't, don't, J. J.,” he begged. “It wasn't that indeed; it is exactly true as I told you. I saw what you were thinking then, but I just hadn't the strength to speak, for the tire and the shame. I was so dead-beat I couldn't think of anything but getting into bed, and I believe I was asleep before I was fairly in. Jocelyn, I don't see how you can be decent to me at all. I feel like a wretch, a scamp, a rascal—”

“Oh, oh! don't say such words!” cried his sister, laying her hand over his lips, and not drawing it away when he held it there and kissed it.

“It isn't that you are *bad*, Joe,” Jocelyn went on: “You get just as much disgusted, well, as I should think a Jerome *would* be! when you find yourself in the midst of bad, low company. But you are restless, and impatient, and stubborn; you want your own way,



and you won't see that you're not old enough to take others' judgment instead of your own. And that leads you into deception: oh, Joe, only think of *mother's boy* stealing in and out of the house like a thief in the night!"

"Oh don't, I say!" groaned the lad, smitten to the heart by the truth of these words, so tenderly, yet so piercingly uttered. "It will be the last time, I promise you that. I've got my full, and I'll never, *never* go with that lot again, no matter how they try to get me. I sha'n't forget last night in one good while."

"And that isn't the worst of it, Joe," said Jocelyn, looking distressed and anxious. "There is father, you have got to tell him. Poor father! and he was so good to you about the boat and all!"

Joe made a sudden turn over in the bed, and gave another deep groan. After a moment's silence, he said "I don't see what's the good of that. It'll only make him feel bad, and give up trusting me, altogether; and that won't help him nor me either. You don't suppose I'm afraid of his flogging me, do you, or locking me in o' nights? I'd rather take that, a heap, than tell him what I know will hurt him so. For he is just the best old father in the world, and I could knock my head against the wall for doing what I know he would never have listened



to. But now it's done—and I know so well the like will never be done again—what's the use of worrying him, and shaming me down to the ground, Jocelyn?"

Jocelyn looked more distressed than ever as she saw how the mere thought of speaking to his father overcame him. She would have spared him if she could, but she knew she must not; this was no time for weakness. She laid her cool hand upon his flushed forehead; she smoothed away the rumped hair; she spoke very tenderly, but she was firm nevertheless.

"I'm sorry, awfully sorry, Joe," she said, "for you as well as for poor father. But you ought to have thought of that before, and now I'm afraid you'll have to go through with it. I can't argue with you about it, Joe; I can only *feel*; and I *know* that such a thing as this ought not to happen in the house and father know nothing about it until perhaps he hears it from somebody outside. Do you think that would make it any easier for him, or for you? No, Joe; you must be a brave boy, and take the consequences of what you've done, like a man. Why, you are not like Juliet. She said right away when she got into that scrape last summer that father must know."

"Oh, a girl!" exclaimed Joe. "They don't mind such things so much. They cry a little,



and then get kissed, and then it's all over. Besides, she didn't do any particular harm; it was that cat of a Pickett girl. But I—! Oh, I do wish you wouldn't bother me now, Jocelyn. I feel bad enough already. I can just tell you if you had the head that I've got now, you wouldn't want to have anything worse to think about. You might better be getting me some baywater, or camphor, or something, to rub it with, and try to keep it from splitting apart!"

Jocelyn started up at once, all the woman and the nurse roused within her.

"You poor boy," she said, pityingly; "I don't wonder your head aches. And here we have let your coffee get cold, and that would help you more than anything. I'll go down and bring you a hot cup, and then I'll bathe your head as long as you want me—"

But Joe caught her by the arm and held her back.

"No, no," he said. "You shan't go. It isn't cold; it's good enough and too good for such as me. Give it to me and let me drink it down,—I can't eat a mouthful yet—and then stay with me, J. J., good old J. J! and keep your hand on my head, and maybe I'll drop off to sleep again. And I'll do what you want me—if I can!"

So the sister sat patiently for a long hour by



the side of her erring brother, stroking away the pain from his throbbing temples with her soft, cool hand, until at length, worn out with his wretched night's experience, he fell into a deep sleep. Then, lifting her heart in a last fervent prayer to God that this might indeed be the turning-point in his life, she rose noiselessly and went softly out of the room, to find a new duty awaiting her.

Little Jessie stood out in the passage, the picture of woe.

"I thought you were *never* coming!" she complained.

"Oh, but I'm here now, you see; and we must get our hats on at once and run off to market, to see about papa's dinner. And Jessie shall choose what we shall have for dessert!"



## CHAPTER XIII.

### JOCELYN TELLS JOE SOMETHING.

WHEN Joe appeared at the dinner-table, rested and refreshed by his quiet day in bed, he looked very much as usual, and only Jocelyn noticed the little guilty start with which he almost shrank away, as his father said cheerily,

“Well, my boy, all right again? How’s the appetite?” Jem, it is true, commented shrewdly, “The idea of Joe, having headaches like a girl!” But her brother did not appear to hear her, and dinner went on pleasantly as usual, and the evening occupations followed. Jocelyn, sitting by the fire with her work, sent more than one appealing glance towards the round table, where her brother, with the others, sat pouring over his lessons for the next day. He did not seem to notice, however, and after sometime, pushing away his books, he got up, muttering something about his eyes being tired, said good night, and went off to bed again.

Jocelyn saw that he was avoiding her, and for a time she forbore to press upon him the painful duty from which she saw he still shrank so nervously.



"I will give him time," she said to herself, "to fight the battle out with his own conscience—and God help him to conquer in the end!"

But as day after day passed, and grew even into weeks, and her brother still persistently kept out of her way, she determined to *make* an opportunity to speak to him. The brief touch of winter had vanished almost as soon as it had come; there had been a few blustering winds in the first days of March, and now the early southern spring was upon them in all its sudden bloom and fragrance. Jocelyn, feeling oppressed one evening with the warmth and light of the sitting-room, where the young people were busy round the lamp with their lessons for the morrow, got up, and throwing a shawl round her shoulders, passed through the hall and stepped out upon the little back porch which belonged to the kitchen, and where Aunt Peggy was wont to smoke her pipe serenely of a summer evening. She was safe in bed now, as Jocelyn knew, and there was no one in the kitchen but Joe, who, as she had heard him say, was there, trying to melt some glue with which he purposed to repair some of his boyish belongings, over the half-dead embers in the stove.

It was a glorious night; the lawn was all in



a flood of silver moonlight; the blossoms of the flowering almond by the porch shone white in the radiance. Jocelyn stood gazing at the glory of it all, and thinking what should she do, how should she speak, so as to reach the heart she longed to waken, when some movement of hers became audible to the boy within, and opening the door suddenly to see who was on that little porch at this hour of the evening, he found himself, most unwillingly face to face with—as it seemed to him—an accusing conscience. He was turning as hastily back, with an annoyed exclamation, when his sister put her hand on his arm, and resolutely detained him.

“Joe!” she said, not pausing now to soften her words in any way; “Don’t you feel rather small, for a big boy, going round the house in this way, dodging your own people, and afraid to look any one in the face? Don’t you know that I can never respect you and that you can never respect yourself while this sort of thing goes on?”

“Oh, yes, it’s all very easy for you to talk,” growled the boy, submitting most reluctantly to the interview which he saw was inevitable. “I suppose it’s not going to father about that thing, you mean, but I guess if you had it to do yourself, you wouldn’t be in any more of a hurry than I am. But there’s just the differ-



ence ! You don't have any need to get into scrapes ; you do as you like. You're the mistress here, and can do everything you choose, and nobody to say you nay. Things are very easy for you, Miss Jocelyn, but if you were in my place——”

He checked himself, for there was a sudden strange look in his sister's face which he did not quite understand. She stood silent a moment, her eyes fixed upon his, and then, as though taking a sudden resolve, she spoke, still with that strange look, and in a breathless sort of way, which made him wonder and feel uncomfortable.

“Joe!” she said. “You think that, do you, that things are very easy for me, that I have no temptations to resist, that I am doing as I like all the time? Well, I am going to show you that you are mistaken, and see if that will help you any to do your own duty.”

She put her hand impulsively to her throat, and drew out something which had been suspended from a slender black silk cord inside her collar. It seemed to be a tiny chamois bag ; she opened it with a touch that Joe saw was quivering, and took out a ring which she slipped upon her finger, and then held it up bravely for his inspection.

The boy looked in perplexity first at the



hand with its new decoration, and then at the sweet downcast face, upon which a tender smile and blush revealed themselves in the gleam of the moonlight.

"Well!" he said, as she remained softly silent; "I see you've got a ring that you seem to be mighty choice of; but what on earth has that got to do with what we were talking about?"

"Why Joe!" Jocelyn drew the hand quickly back and covered it with the other. "Can't you really understand at all? A girl would in a minute, Juliet, or even Janet, or even little Jem, I believe. But they don't know anything about it; I never showed it to them, nor told them a word about it, not even father—all these long, long months that he has been gone! Only now, Joe, to you, with a purpose, and a hope."

The boy stared at her still in utter mystification, until presently a sudden gleam of comprehension dawned in his face.

"All these long months that he has been gone!" he repeated. "Is it anything to do with Dick—our old Dick? And what is the need of a mystery then? And what has it got to do with me?"

"O Joe!" and Jocelyn spoke up warmly enough now. "Do you remember *when* he went away, and all that had come upon us just



before? Was that a time, when poor father was almost broken-hearted, and all of us feeling so desolate and bereaved; was that a time for me to be bringing forward a new happiness that had just been offered to me alone, taking a comfort and consolation to myself that the rest of you could not have an equal share in; letting some one, whom you all used to think was as much your particular friend as mine, be coming to the house to see me specially, wanting to take me off to talk with him, and all that, when the rest of you were feeling so suddenly alone and lonely? Or, to fill my life with my own individual duties and pleasures when just then the whole family needed me most? No, Joe, I could not do it. I could not even speak of it, and I sent him away without letting him speak of it, because I thought you would all, especially father, feel hurt that I could even think of such a thing at such a time; and still more because I thought perhaps father would not permit me to make the sacrifice. That it was hard, Joe, I will not deny. It would have been just the greatest help and comfort in the world to me to have Dick around just in those first months when my grief was so heavy upon me, and when all the care and the responsibility of this large family were added to my burden. But I knew I could not do justice to you all



and to him too; and he had a good offer which must be accepted or declined at once. So I sent him away, Joe; and he has been gone a year and a half, and I have not even let him write specially to me. *This* is all I have had—” she lifted her hand again and gazed lovingly at the token it wore—“and you may judge now whether everything has been so easy to me—and whether I have been doing exactly as I liked all these months?”

Joe had stood listening speechless with surprise, while Jocelyn poured out these impulsive words, and now he remained gazing at her, amazed, and touched to the very depths of his boyish heart. When he could speak, it was only to stammer at first,

“Did you, did you, J. J.? Did you really do that for all of us?” And presently, as she sat, looking up at him with wistful eyes of pleading, he broke out again,

“Well! I knew you were a brick before, J. J., a regular first-class brick, but this beats all!” and then, with a sudden manly note in his voice, “But it is high time it should be put a stop to. There’s no sense in your going on being so hard on yourself, or poor old Dick either. You must just tell father about it at once, and have at least the satisfaction of having his letters to yourself.”



But Jocelyn shook her head with a pensive smile.

"No," she said, with gentle decision. "Not just yet, Joe; not till Juliet has graduated—it isn't very long now, you know—and is not at school any longer, so that she may learn to take my place in the house.

"And indeed not until his old lady is ready to give up her wanderings. It has been a capital thing for him, this opportunity to see so much of the world, and especially to examine the hospital practice in so many great cities. There is no hurry; he is contented and happy now, I think, and I am too; that is, I should be," she corrected herself quickly, and fixed her eyes upon the boy's face with a meaning glance, "if you—if my brother—"

"Yes, I know, and he will," broke in Joe, resolutely. "You won't have given me all this confidence for nothing my dear, good old J. J.!" and he threw his arms impulsively about her with a demonstration that was very rare in him, and precious accordingly. "I should be worse than a coward if I held back from what I brought on myself anyhow after what you have told me, and I'll do what you wish this very night, right now, before father goes to bed. Indeed, it was hating to pain him that kept me back more than my own—"



"I know, I know," said Jocelyn, eagerly returning her brother's caress. "But even so, I am sure it is right he should be told; and you will never, *never*, take the chance of paining him again in such a way, will you, Joe?" A strange look came over the boy's face. A deeper, more thoughtful and reverent look than Jocelyn had ever seen there before.

"I dare not promise that of myself, Jocelyn," he said solemnly. "I did try, I did mean to be a better fellow when father was so good about the boat and all that. But I see I can't, of myself; I don't believe anybody can. I know where you go for your help and strength, Jocelyn; I used to think it was all a notion; but after what you've told me to-night, after seeing what it really means to be a Christian and love others as well as you do yourself—well, I mean to try again, and try your way. I'll give you this promise J. J.,—*by God's help* I never will!"

"O Joe!" it was all the girl could say, for the joy that filled her heart. But the tender embrace in which she folded him, the happy tears he felt upon his cheek, made that enough. He returned her kisses with fervor.

"And now go to bed, dear," he said in that sudden new manly tone of his. "I hope the others, have gone too, for I am going to have a long talk with my father."



## CHAPTER XIV.

### A HAPPY THANKSGIVING.

JOCELYN never sought to know what passed in the long interview between Joe and his father that night. She lay awake, full of all tender and anxious thoughts for them both, until she heard them coming slowly up-stairs about midnight; and when she met them at breakfast next morning she took pains to betray no consciousness of any thing unusual, and the others noticed nothing, except perhaps, that their father seemed rather grave and abstracted, and that Joe was a good deal more considerate than usual in the way of passing the muffins, and offering to take the shell off Janet's egg which scorched her own more delicate fingers.

Jocelyn was glad to keep any cloud of wrong-doing, and the unhappiness which is sure to follow it, from their young hearts, as much as might be: she was content to bear with her father the burden which Joe had put upon them, and to help each other to help the boy. And as time passed on, they had the infinite



comfort of seeing that he was sincere in his resolve to seek strength where alone it could be fully found; and Jocelyn, one morning, pausing, duster in hand, while putting Joe's room in order, at sight of his Bible lying open on the table, felt the glad tears spring to her eyes, as she noticed a broad pencil-mark against the words—

*“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”*—Is. 40: 29-31.

“Dear old Joe!” she said impulsively to herself. “He is trying, and in the right way! And here I have been letting myself doubt sometimes whether it was worth while after all to have been so hard on myself, and on Dick; and yet, it was just that which seemed to impress him more than anything else! Oh, how more than glad, how thankful, I am!”

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Meanwhile, the days were passing on, and the beautiful southern spring, about which Janet had written a very flowery composition, likening it to a lovely young maiden, tripping



lightly forward and scattering blossoms wherever she went (Joe had much ado to keep from muttering "Chestnuts!" when Jem was dilating upon the beauties of this composition), this same fairy maiden had tripped away as lightly as she had come, leaving behind her a wealth of delicate bloom and fragrance everywhere. The crocuses and tulips, the hyacinths and lilacs, went into retirement again after the vanishing of their fairy god-mother; but summer had followed upon her retreating footsteps, and there were roses; roses everywhere; and all the air was full of their exquisite breath, and of the subtler perfume of heliotrope and spice-pinks, and great white golden-hearted lilies.

Every old-fashioned garden, every door-yard, and even the grass-bordered edges of the streets, were in flowers; every porch was wreathed with honeysuckle or microphylla; the old town was looking its prettiest, and Jessie had run in to tell Jocelyn that the June apples were all ripe on the tree at the side of the house, and to beg her to come and gather some for her, when the morning came on which the visit promised to Janet was to become an accomplished fact, and Nan and her mother to arrive by the boat from Washington.

This arrival was the second important event



of the summer: the first had been Juliet's graduation from the old-fashioned Seminary at which all the young ladies of Oakleigh in turn received their blue-ribboned diplomas, accompanied by certain words of loving counsel and farewell, and a copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress," to serve as a help to them in their own pilgrimage through this life to the Heavenly Country. She had reached the spot indeed,

"Where the brook and river meet,  
Womanhood and childhood fleet;"

"And a very graceful, dignified, well-bred girl your sister is, my dear," announced Aunt Emily to Jocelyn; much attracted by the pure clear-cut style of the young girl's beauty, and the touch of reserve in her manner which made some good persons think "the second Miss Jerome a little difficult: not near so pleasant and like her mother as Miss Jocelyn."

There was no touch of chilliness in Juliet's manner toward their lady guest. She admired her elegant and high-bred relative extremely, and was eagerly desirous of winning her good opinion, so as to increase the probabilities of that invitation to spend the winter in Washington upon which she had set her heart. She devoted herself to her entertainment therefore, and Jocelyn was content, even though a little wistful, to see them setting out, day after day,



for drives and walks together, or making themselves comfortable on the shady veranda in their cool white morning-gowns, with their fancy-work and the last new magazines, while she went about her housekeeping duties, which were naturally a little more exacting than usual at this time; consulted with Aunt Peggy about breakfasts and dinners; trotted off to market before breakfast, concocted dainty desserts with her own clever hands, and grew hot and tired over the preserving and the pickling that must be done when the fruit was in right condition, or not at all.

Neither would she take any undue credit to herself for having no feeling of envy or irritation. "I really could not feel easy to trust all this to novice hands," she said to herself with her usual honesty; "though Juliet offered very kindly to help me. And it is really a relief to have some one to do the entertaining for me so nicely as she does, while I am obliged to be so busy. I'm so glad they seem to like each other so much, and I hope Aunt Emily will ask her to go home with them. *I* wouldn't want to be away this winter—for I believe, I believe,—and anyhow, haven't I always for my own comfort,

“The secret of a happy thought  
I do not care to speak?”



But Aunt Emily did not ask Juliet to go home with her. When the month's visit was ended at Oakleigh, the visit which had been all pure bliss to little Nan, who had no brothers or sisters to help make the house lively at home; her mother made her farewells with only the vague general invitation, which may mean either much or little. "You must all come; we shall be delighted to see any of you whenever you can make it convenient to leave home." And Juliet had to get over her disappointment and chagrin as best she might.

Of course she said nothing about it, and equally of course, no one mentioned the subject to her; only Jocelyn, watching with anxious tenderness for some outbreak of irritability, or some lapse into moodiness, was gratefully surprised to find nothing but perhaps an added dignity and composure, and a sisterly readiness to take up her share of the household duties, and render assistance wherever it was required.

"What a fine creature Juliet is after all!" thought the older sister, with almost a motherly pride and fondness! "How brimful of character! And I do believe she too, as well as dear old Joe, has found her springs of action in that living source from which all that is good in us must come. Oh, mother, dear! If you can only see and know—and perhaps you do—



how happy it must make you! How happy it makes me!"

And so time passed, and the tide of these young lives flowed peacefully on, day in, and day out, with but few special events to mark its course, and yet ever full of the recurring duties and pleasures, the small accidents and incidents, that were natural to their age.

The long summer vacation was over, but the school-girls and boys made nutting parties on Saturday afternoons in the woods along the river bank, and came home laden with shining brown treasures of chinquapins and chestnuts, which they roasted round the hearth of evenings, instead of going out in the boat, as on the magical moonlit summer nights. The roses and dahlias had given place to the spicy chrysanthemums, the last of the brave sisterhood of flowers to brave the fatal touch of the frost, found blooming sometimes, white above the whiter snow, and even with the chill flakes drifting in their golden hearts.

"How beautiful they are, and what a lesson they teach us of faith and courage!" Jocelyn thought one afternoon as she was gathering the last cluster of odorous blossoms upon the big bush by the porch, and she gave a little start as Aunt Peggy's voice sounded unexpectedly over her shoulder;



“ You likes dem artemishies, don’t ye, Miss Jos’lyn,” said the old servant, amiably. “ Dat’s what dey use to call ’em in my time, ye know, an’ I don’ wondah you likes ’em; dey kine o’ puts me in mine o’ you, dey do; kine o’ sweet an’ strong too. But I was gwine to speak to ye ’bout dat ar plaguy turkey gobblah, Miss Jos’lyn. He ain’t got no mo’ sense dan turkeys has in giner’l, dough I did raise him my own s’ef, an’ try an’ teach him some sort o’ mannahts. He jes made up his mind he *won’t* stay home, inside his own presarves; an’ Mis’ Yardley nex do’, she jes sent in word—she ain’t got much mo’ mannahts to my thinkin’, ef ye’ll ’scuse me, Miss Jos’lyn, dan de po’ gobblah hisse’f, ya, ha! She jes sont in word dat ef we don’ kill dat ah turkey so’st to keep him offen her fence, an’ outen her gyardin, she jes gwine to kill him herse’f! She do it, too, sho’s you bawn; so I reckon, long as dat ah new holiday, Thanksgiving, or whatevah you calls it, is a comin’ along putty soon now, I jes mought as well make up my mine to part wi him, an I’ll put him in the coop to-night to fat him a little, po’ fellah!”

“ Thanksgiving isn’t a new holiday, Aunt Peggy,” said Jocelyn, smiling. “ Its been kept up North ever since the first settlers came to this country, a long, long time—more than



three hundred years ago. Everything looked so bleak and cold on those rocks where they landed, a poor little band of persecuted men and women, and they had such hard times making out to live, and the chances of any crops being raised there seemed so small, that when they did succeed in getting things to grow, and saw they were going to be able to make homes there, why they set apart a day every year after the harvest was gathered in, to make special thanksgiving for it, and a very good and beautiful custom I think it is. They didn't get into the way of it down here so soon, for the people who came to Virginia thought more of Christmas and Easter; but you know well enough it's been kept here now for years and years, ever since I can remember, and it's just because you're an old aristocrat, Aunt Peggy, and want to hold on to the old, old ways, that you make believe you don't care anything about Thanksgiving Day. You do, I know, for you're too good a Christian not to."

"Ya, ya, ya!" The old negress' mellow chuckle made itself heard again, but she persisted in maintaining her allegiance to old customs of her youth and her Southern home.

"Dunno, to tell de troof, Miss Jos'lyn, whethah it's kase I b'long to de' stocracy or not. Spec maybe it is, but Christmas an,



Eastah good 'nuff holidays fo' ole Peggy, an' I says my pra'ars an' gives thanks ev'y day fo' what I gits, de Lawd's name be praised! But I ain't got no 'bjections whatevah to other folkse havin' a p'ticklah day sot apaht fo' thanksgivin'; an' I'll go an' shet de gobblah up in de coop so's he kin have time to 'flect on his lattah eend."

Jocelyn could not help laughing at the old creature's comical stubbornness.

"I'm sorry for the gobbler, Aunt Peggy," she said, "and especially, as I know he's such a pet of yours. But you know I've been wanting you a long time to get rid of all this scattered remnant of poultry you hanker so to keep around you. It's no place for chickens and turkeys, a town back-yard; they're bound to be a nuisance to both owners and neighbors, and I guess you had better make up your mind to part with them all. Christmas will be here in another month, you know, and then you'll take more satisfaction in your roasts and your potpies. And meanwhile I guess, if you think about it a little, Aunt Peggy, you'll find you have enough to be thankful for, to be willing to take a special day for it."

"I know something I've got to be thankful for, Dottelyn," said Jessie, who was as usual, hovering near her sister, like her little shadow.



"And what is that, pet?" asked Jocelyn, going in to the house to find a glass and put her chrysanthemums in water.

"Why, my beautiful new dolly Aunt Emily brought me—that it didn't get broken when I let it drop the other day."

"And is that all?" asked Jocelyn, smiling.

"N—no—" hesitated the little girl, looking around the room and considering. "I s'pose, because we've got everything, all over the house; and there isn't anybody sick; and, and, we're going to have turkey; can't we have boiled chestnuts in the stuffing, Dottelyn? And, Christmas is coming—oh, and I don't know, 'cept because I love you, Dottelyn, and you love me!"

"That I do, you little dear!" said her sister heartily, stooping to kiss the rosy mouth. "And that is one of the sweetest things I have to be thankful for too!"

"It is, hey?" repeated Joe, who just then came in by the side door, his cheeks all ruddy with the cold. "Well here's another—but I've got to be paid for it in the same coin!"

He held up a letter with a triumphant air as he spoke, and Jocelyn, getting a glimpse of the superscription, grew red as a rose herself, and held up her face promptly to pay the price demanded.



"But what does it mean, Joe," she exclaimed, as soon as she had got it in her own hands. "It isn't a foreign letter at all; it's mailed from New York; O Joe!" breaking open the envelope with fingers trembling with eagerness, and rapidly scanning the first few lines. "O Joe! he *is* really in this country again—he is coming home; he will be here, Joe, in Oakleigh, day after to-morrow!"

"And the day after that is Thanksgiving," said Joe, looking almost as happy as his sister. "So what did I tell you? Dear old Dick! Won't it be jolly to see him again? But here, read ahead, J. J.; let a body know what it all means, how it came about so all of a sudden."

"That's just what he says," said Jocelyn, half-laughing, half tearful, in her happy excitement, yet trying to read through the soft mist in her eyes. "His old lady, as he always calls her, who hadn't really anything the matter with her, you know, except a notion that she *was* going to have everything, took a fancy all of a sudden, that she was tired of wandering about over Europe, and wanted to come back to the United States and celebrate that Yankee festival of Thanksgiving with her daughter here, before going home to settle down in her own beloved England for the rest of her life. It was all decided in such a flash, Dick says,



he hadn't a minute to write, there was so much to attend to; and besides, he didn't know but she'd change her mind before they fairly got on board ship; so he waited till they actually reached Sandy Hook, and he scribbled a line then, and sent it ashore by the pilot boat. You know she's been awfully good to Dick, Joe, this old lady; and it's been a capital thing for him, all this journeying about with her, in a pecuniary way, as well as every other; but still, she is so peculiar you know, and so very changeable—"

"Yes, yes, I know about all that," said Joe, mischievously; "but what else does Dick say? Let's have the rest, J. J., please!"

The blush rose deepened to damask in Jocelyn's cheek.

"Oh, only that he'll start south as soon as he sees Mrs. Chumley safe home with her daughter; and the rest, Joe, it isn't much, but the rest, I think, is just for myself! And I think I'd like to read it by myself—"

She turned, in a happy flush, and almost running through the hall, took refuge in the parlor, in the curtained shelter of the same bay window, where, now nearly two years ago, she had had that first special talk with Dick, which led up to the still more special talk in the last few lines of this brief and hasty epistle—the



first—"just for herself," she had ever had from him!

"Dear old J. J.! Ain't I glad for her?" said Joe to himself, looking after her, amused, but still more touched. "And for all of us, for that matter; he always seemed like a 'son and a brother,' and now he will be one sure enough!"

"But where is Juliet, do you know, little Jess? Aren't you glad Dick is coming home? Do you remember Dick, who used to let you hunt in his pocket for marshmallow drops and peppermint lozenges? I must go and tell Juliet; I have a letter for her too; and you find Jem and Janet; everybody will be glad to know dear old Dick Fairfax is coming home!"

Jessie walked off with rather a puzzled air; she was not quite so sure in her recollections of the wanderer as the others were; and Joe ran up-stairs, boy-fashion, three steps at a time, to find Juliet, carry her the good tidings, and give her her own letter.

She was as glad, in her quieter way, as Joe himself; "How nice it will be to have him coming in and out again every day," she said. "He always seemed like a sort of elder brother to us all, and we have missed him so much."

"Humph! well, yes, rather so," replied Joe, with a comical sort of grimace, but Juliet did



not notice any special significance in his tone, for she was breaking the seal of her own letter, and running her eye down its pages with a look which deepened in interest the farther she went, and presently beamed out in a smile of delighted surprise.

“Well, Joe!” she exclaimed, after rapidly possessing herself of the contents of the letter, and too full of joy to linger for the details, “you certainly have been the bearer of good news all around this time! What do you think I have here? An invitation from Aunt Emily to come on after Christmas and spend the rest of the winter in Washington with her! Just the very thing I was longing for, and she says she was planning it when she was here in the summer, but thought it best to say nothing about it till the time came nearer, as

“‘The best-laid plans o’ mice and men  
Gang aft a’glee!’

“But there is nothing I can think of to make this plan ‘gang a’glee’; Jocelyn ought to be the one to go, I know; but I know also that she wouldn’t leave the house to me yet—maybe she will another winter—and yet there is really no need of both of us here—”

Juliet had gone on, in the fullness of her heart, reasoning the matter out with herself,



rather than with her brother, but now as she paused, something struck her as a little strange in his silence, and glancing at him more closely, she became aware that he was regarding her with a peculiar look which did not show as much sympathy with her happiness as Joe nowadays was in the habit of expressing.

"Well, Joe," she said, with some disappointment in her tone; "I guess I'll go and take my news to Jocelyn; you don't seem to care much about it."

She made a movement to rise from her little sewing-chair, but Joe put out his hand to check her.

"No; don't go to Jocelyn just yet," he said, and his manner was more and more incomprehensible to the eager and delighted girl. Then, after a pause in which they remained gazing at each other, "Juliet, do you care so *very* much about this trip? Have you quite set your heart on it?"

A sudden quick chill of apprehension seized the young girl at the almost solemn tone of this question. What? Was this, her cherished plan, doomed then to 'gang aglee'? Oh, but that would be too hard!

She checked her impulse to cry out in reply, "Why, of course I do! Of course I have!" and asked instead, fixing as grave a glance upon



her brother as that with which he was regarding her,

“Why do you ask, Joe? And in that tone?”

“Because,—” Joe hesitated, and moved uneasily from one foot to the other. It was a very hard thing for the warm-hearted lad to do, to dash all those bright hopes to the ground, to blight all that fair flower of gladness in the very bud! It was not often that Juliet, his calm, self-possessed, dignified sister, showed such eagerness about anything for herself; and boy as he was, he knew that the prospect of a winter at the capital, with all the refined enjoyments which would be put into it for her, must be most delightful to a young girl, who had never left the narrow bounds of a quiet country town like Oakleigh. But then—Jocelyn! Dear, good, unselfish Jocelyn, who had been like a mother to them all these two long, difficult years, who had put aside so cheerfully all thought of her own happiness for their comfort—was it fair that just now as it had come within her reach again, was it fair to her or to Dick either, that it should be hindered again, Jocelyn confined still by a thousand and one cares and occupations, when there was Juliet, just as old as Jocelyn was when the burden was laid upon her, and with a good deal more confidence in herself, Joe thought. She



had had nothing to do since she left school but occupy herself as she liked; a few household duties, of course, but plenty of time to read, to do fancy-work, to come and go with her young companions, to attend the church societies, practice her music, see company, in short, all the things a young lady cared to do.

“Wasn’t it her turn now to take some real charge of things upon herself, and give Jocelyn a little chance, a little freedom—and yet——”

Juliet sat watching his perplexed and changeful face till she could bear it no longer.

“Don’t you think this is getting to be a little trying?” she asked presently in a controlled voice. “Suppose you tell me just what you mean, Joe, and let us get it over.”

“Well!” Joe took a long breath and made a sort of plunge at his disagreeable task. “I will tell you, then, Juliet, though I hate to upset you, and I don’t know that I’ve got any right to either. But somebody must think a little bit for old J. J., since she won’t for herself. Did you ever notice; did it ever occur to you, that Dick cared any more about her than he did for the rest of us? No, I see you never thought of it. Well, he did however, all along it seems, ever since she was a little tot, and he used to look out for her. And when he had



this offer to go abroad, and came to tell her about it, he told her a good many other things too, it seems; and he said he wouldn't think of going if she would, well, let him arrange things as *he* wanted to. But she wouldn't listen to him, Juliet, just because she knew how much we all needed her then, and because she thought it might make father feel bad; and she sent him off, and wouldn't even let him write anything but just general letters for us all to read, because she wouldn't let us think she could take any happiness for herself that wasn't ours just the same. And she's kept it up all this time, and never let it make her cross, or anything but sweet and good to us all; and I say it's fine, Juliet, it's fine, of old J. J.; and it seems a shame that just now, when Dick is coming back, and you could set her free, that this, this other thing should come up—and yet, Juliet, please don't think—maybe I shouldn't have spoken——”

The boy paused, with a distressed look at the girl's face, which had flushed up so at first, but now had gone so pale, and with such a rigid set about the mouth. But, at the note of pain in his voice, Juliet looked up and summoned a ghost of a smile.

“No, no,” she said, “you were quite right to tell me; I suppose we shall all be told now



since he is coming back. And you haven't told me, Joe, how it happened that you were the first to be taken into confidence? Being a boy—"

"Yes," said Joe, with a sort of rueful smile of his own. "Being a boy, and such a scamp of a one, was just the way in which I happened to know about it. She told me once when I was in a worse pickle than usual, and gibing at her for being able to do just as she liked, and have everything her own way, she told me so as to let me see that she wasn't having it quite as easy as I thought, so as to help me not to want to be my own master quite so much. But she was just as nice about it, never a fret or a grumble, never a bit of vanity or conceit, only just trying to help me. And she did help me, Juliet; she has helped us all, and I do think we owe her anything we can do for her in turn, don't you? I hated to tell you, to put the least little bit of a spoke in your wheel, but somehow, I thought you'd rather, after all—"

Juliet made a little movement with her hand to check his deprecations.

"That's all right, Joe," she said, her voice quivering a little in spite of her resolute effort at composure. "You were quite right not to let me go on thinking things that could not be,



and of course, as soon as I heard—well! nobody in the world can be gladder of Jocelyn's happiness than I am, or feel more how well she deserves it. I want to go straight and tell her so; she won't mind my speaking to her about it now, I guess; and then, when I know something more, I can write to Aunt Emily and explain."

She paused for a moment, while Joe looked ruefully at her, and then added gravely, "For the rest, Joe, I know I am not so unselfish or so considerate of others as Jocelyn is; it does not come naturally or easily to me to be so. I know I can never fill her place with you all, but if the care of the family does come upon me, I can only say I shall try to do my very best, by God's help. And you, who know, who understand—well, what this has cost me—" glancing toward the letter she still held in her hand—"the rest need never know just how hard it is—you will help me too, won't you, Joe? For indeed, it will be a great undertaking, I never realized before *how* great—and I shall need all the help I can get."

Joe stood looking and listening as though he could scarcely believe his ears. What! was this *Juliet*, the proud, reserved, self-reliant Juliet, asking *him*, her younger brother, the hobbledehoy, the scapegrace, of the family, to *help*



her? The boy felt strangely moved; his sense of manliness, of responsibility, was deepened; he felt that he could and would help his brave young sister when this burden came to be laid upon her slender shoulders. But Joe had learned by experience not to be boastful, and he only said earnestly, coming closer to her and laying his hand upon hers,

"I'll promise this much, not to *hinder*, at least, my dear. And don't you be a bit afraid or uneasy, Juliet. After the pluck and the right feeling you've shown this afternoon—well! all I can say is, I know I ought to be a better fellow with two such sisters as I've got! 'The Lord take a likin'' to both of you, as Aunt Peggy would say—"

And trying with a laugh to hide the moisture that had suddenly sprung to his honest eyes, he made an abrupt departure to his own room.

Juliet's look changed as she found herself alone. For one brief moment she gave way to the feeling of bitter disappointment that possessed her. She lifted her head as she rose from her chair, in a passionate gesture:

"It is hard to give it up!" she cried. "Lord help me to do it cheerfully—as she did!" And feeling stronger, even for the asking, she too turned, and went hastily down-stairs in search of her sister.



She found her still where we left her, within the curtained recess of the bay-window, leaning back in the big chair, her letter held loosely in her hand, a dreamy, far-away look upon her happy face. Juliet came up gently from behind and bending over her gave her a tender kiss.

“I’m so glad, Jocelyn,” she said. “Joe told me, and I’m so glad for you and for all of us! Dear old Dick—”

And then before another word could be said, or Jocelyn’s reply, except by the fervent return of her caress, the three little girls rushed in, Jessie having gone to fetch Jem and Janet from a playmate’s house to hear the good news; all was at once an eager bustle of question, answer, and exclamation; and Juliet, feeling that this was no time for any special communication, stayed awhile to share in the general congratulation, which began all over again as the father came in from his office, and then quietly stole away again up to her own chamber.

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“Mind, you get all the nicest things in the market, now, Jocelyn,” said Jem, with a whimsical air of feeling the importance of the situation, as she brought her sister’s hat to her next morning after breakfast. Jocelyn was taking an early start, for there was a great deal to be



done that day, and the note of preparation was already sounding in Aunt Peggy's domains.

"Dick's been away, all this time, in all sorts of grand places, and we must give him as fine a dinner for Thanksgiving as he could get anywhere, you know!" Jocelyn laughed.

"As if there were no one else but Dick to be thought of!" she said. "I feel a great deal more concerned about his uncle: the old doctor is much more of an epicure. It's for him I'm going now to see about the terrapin and oysters, and to choose out the freshest celery and cauliflower."

"Ugh! terrapin!" repeated Jem, making a face of disgust. "Horrid black leathery things! I don't see how anybody can bear to eat 'em!"

"Ah, but when you see them come on the table they'll be all white and dainty as cocoanut meat," rejoined her sister. "And that reminds me; you shall have your favorite orange-cocoanut for tea, Miss Jem; and what shall I get for you, Janet and Jessie?"

"Oh, anything," said Janet, who was rather indifferent to the pleasures of the table. "There'll be plenty of good things, I know." And Jessie said hesitatingly: "I've a great mind to go with you myself, Dottelyn," the child would never get over her baby pet-name for her sister.



"But Aunt Peggy's going to make pies, and she said I might bake some in my dolly's little tins if I came right away."

"Umph! aren't you a lucky youngster," grumbled Jem. "We've got to be off to school, just the same as if to-morrow wasn't Thanksgiving. I think we ought to have holiday the day before, same as Christmas Eve."

"Ah, but you'll have it the day after, and away over till Monday," said Jocelyn cheerily. "And it's time you were starting now, girls. Get your hats and come on with me as far as we can go together. And Jessie, mind, and don't bother Aunt Peggy too much, dear. There's so much to do, and so much depends on her keeping good-natured and not getting into a stew!"

There was a great deal to do indeed, in preparation for what Aunt Peggy called "sech pertick'ler company," at such a festival time, and the kitchen and colonnade were the scene of a busy and cheerful activity all day long. There were raisins to be stoned, currants to be picked over, citron to be sliced, and crackers to be rolled, for the regulation plum pudding; cocoanut to be grated, and sweet potatoes and squash to be boiled and put through the sieve for pies; cakes to be made and "frosted"; nuts to be cracked, and all possible preparations to be



made to avoid unnecessary work on the next day.

Everybody lent a willing hand to the labor of love; Juliet was as busy as Jocelyn herself, and no one would have suspected from word or look that she was hiding a keen disappointment behind her cheerful smile. When evening came, and brought the traveler, sunburned and eager, home with it, he found no lack in the girl's warm welcome, nor suspected that his home-coming which brought such happiness to him and others, had put out of her reach a more special pleasure of her own.

Neither, when the festival day arrived, and they all gathered with grateful hearts and happy faces about the Thanksgiving table, was there any shadow of a shade upon her countenance which could chill the general joyousness, or give a hint of any private, personal pain.

Only, when the festivities were all happily over, when evening had come again; when Jessie was "putting herself to sleep" cosily in her bed, as she had now learned to do, and Jem and Janet had gone off, escorted by Joe, to a little party at a schoolmate's house; when Mr. Jerome and Dick's uncle had retired to the study to have a "common-sense talk" over the young people's prospects, and Dick himself had taken Jocelyn off to the parlor for a less sober,



but perhaps not less wise, sort of a talk, why then, the young girl found herself alone; and with something of a left-out feeling, she sat down in the big chair in front of the sitting-room fire, gazing quietly, but a little drearily, into its dying embers, and watching one red coal after another fade, blacken, and crumble into colorless ashes.

Meanwhile, Jocelyn, sitting with her friend, in the curtained window-recess, looked up with him to the same star of evening which shone in as pure, as brilliant, as high, as it had done that first evening, now nearly two years ago. Suddenly she bethought her of her sister, left solitary to her own devices, and rose up quickly at the thought.

"Juliet is sitting somewhere all by herself, Dick," she said, coaxingly. "We must not be selfish; she has been so good and dear lately; and she really has hardly heard anything at all about your wanderings yet. I'm going to find her and ask her to come and visit with us for a while; you'd like it, wouldn't you," and without waiting for the rather doubtful reply, she went quickly out of the room, and in and out looking for her sister.

"Why, dear," she said cheerily, seeing the young figure sitting rather forlornly in the dusk before the fading hearth; "are you here,



in the dark, and with such a discouraged-looking fire? Come, we want you in the parlor with us. Dick really hasn't half an audience for all his wonderful traveler's tales!"

The young girl looked up with a smile from which she could not quite efface the wistfulness.

"I guess you are not tired yet, either of you, of your dual solitude. Two are a company and three a crowd, you know, in some cases, and I am doing very well here, resting, and watching the fire. Just look a minute: did you ever see anything prettier than the changing colors of those coals, and the bewitching little blue and yellow flames that curl up every now and then amongst them?"

Jocelyn seated herself deliberately upon the arm of the big chair, and laid her own arm over the back of it, touching the girl's dark hair softly with her fingers.

"Juliet," she said, gravely; "you are keeping something from me. You have got something on your mind that is troubling you. Now don't say you haven't, dear, please: I *thought* I felt it before, and now I know it. Tell me what it is, won't you?" she pleaded, and then suddenly, "what was that letter Joe brought you the same evening that mine came? I'm sure he said he brought you one, but there was



so much to think of just then—I ought to have asked you—”

“Nonsense!” interposed Juliet hastily. “Why should you suppose it was of any special consequence? But—” hesitatingly, and summoning resolution: “it *was* of some importance, and has got to be answered. And as you’ll be certain to hear of it from the Washington folks, I might better speak of it myself. It is nothing except that Aunt Emily has invited me very kindly to make her a little visit this winter. But of course I shan’t think of going now; I shall write her that there is quite too important an event about to happen in our own family just now!”

Jocelyn bent down over the back of the chair, and the two sisters’ eyes met in a long affectionate look.

“Juliet! did you really mean to give that up for me? Something you’ve wanted so much for so long! Well, I shall not soon forget that!” and it was the lips now that made their loving interchange together.

“But, my dear child! There is not the slightest occasion for any such sacrifice; whatever put it in your head that there was? The ‘important event’ as you call it—” the kindly darkness hid her blushes—“is not going to happen so very soon, I assure you. Why, he has



only just got home, Juliet, and he has been away so long I feel as if I shall have to get acquainted with him all over again, in his new relation, anyhow. And there is so much to be done; his uncle is going to give up his practice to him, you know; he says he has earned the right to rest; and Dick will have to get started a little; and there are some alterations to be made in the house over there; and here, there are the children to be fitted out for the winter, and the holidays coming, and everything. Oh no, Juliet; I am glad to have him back of course; we shall have the old nice times again, all of us; but what made you suppose I should be in such a terrible hurry to leave you all at once!"

Juliet had listened in an amazement that gradually changed into relief and delight, but she was still so confused that she could only say in a bewildered sort of way, "Joe, you know, he thought—"

Jocelyn broke into a merry peal of laughter. "Joe!" she exclaimed. "He's a dear old fellow, but he's a *boy*, don't you know, my dear, and what do boys know, or men either, for that matter, about such momentous affairs? They only think when a thing is going to be done it must be done at once and got over with!"

"Why, of course they do," sounded the voice



of one of the maligned sex gaily in the doorway. "And right they are too, aren't they, Juliet? Here is this sister of yours,——"

"Talking over Juliet's delightful expectations of a visit to Washington with her," interrupted Jocelyn saucily.

"Isn't it nice of Aunt Emily to ask her? And handy about my shopping? What a glorious Thanksgiving this is all round, isn't it!—Only it was too bad, dear, so much of it was spoiled for you by the thought of such a needless sacrifice!"

"It was not spoiled at all," returned her sister. "The planning to give it up made me think of the visit in quite a different way. That perhaps it was best for me not to go; might be a temptation, make me dissatisfied when I came home. I don't believe I shall be half so apt to be spoiled by it now! But Jocelyn, I can't help being glad! And I'll do all sorts of pretty fancy work for you while I'm there!"

"Nonsense! You'll enjoy yourself, and be happy; so that I won't feel selfish in being so happy myself!" And once more their arms went round each other in a glad embrace.

"Which is all very well, you know, only I don't see where my share comes in!" cried Dick, whimsically. Whereupon the arms were



opened, and he too was drawn within the charmed circle.

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When the news spread through the Jay's Nest the next morning—how happy Jocelyn and Dick were going to be in their way and Juliet in hers—there was a grand flutter among the Jay birds; Jem, as usual, was the first to give voice to her sentiments.

“If it was anybody but Dick, who belonged, anyhow, and if he was going to take Jocelyn away, or if it was to happen right off before they got used to the thought of it, why, she didn't know—she didn't believe—she'd be willing. But as it was, it wouldn't make but a little bit of difference, and how nice it would be to go and see them, when they were really married! And then a wedding would be such fun! O Jocelyn! As Juliet would be having such grand times in Washington, mightn't *she* and Janet be bridesmaids, and Jessie the little maid of honor to carry the basket of flowers before her?”

But here Janet interposed before Juliet could recover from her amazement at being thus disposed of.

“Why *Jem*? Don't you suppose Juliet will be back in time for the wedding? I guess not even such good times as I had at Uncle Harry's



would keep her away from Jocelyn's wedding. And of course she'll be bridesmaid herself, only maybe we can, too. Will you let us, Jocelyn? Oh, I didn't mean to make you blush so!"

"Just hear 'em cackle!" growled Joe, with a frown of superiority. "You've made more chatter, you girls, in the five minutes since you've heard the secret than I did all the months I've known it. Haven't they, J. J.?"

A glance of humorous meaning from his sister's smiling eyes recalled to the lad the circumstances which had led her to give him her precious confidence. It had the effect of moderating his boyish self-complacency, and he interfered no more with the joyous volubility which is essential to the feminine nature on such happy occasions. They continued to "chatter" to their hearts' content, taking under review every possible point that could suggest itself in regard to the courtship, the marriage, the visit; even Aunt Peggy had to come in, Mahaly accompanying, to swell the chorus of comment and congratulation.

"Laws bless yo' little heart, honey, was you a-conjurin' to fool ole Peggy? Why she knowed it de whole blessed time. She jes cotch de look in yo' eyes, you an' Mars Dick, when you was sayin' farewell to one anoddah, an' dat was 'nuff fo' Peggy! But she wan't a



gwine to say nuffin' 'till oddah folks got ready to talk. Peggy know how to keep her mouf shet, but she got to open it now, sho' 'nuff, to tell you how glad she is kase you's so happy, honey, an' to pray de Lawd fo' to bless you an' yo' husban' in yo' ingoin' an' yo' outcomin's, yo' basket an yo' sto'!"

"Laws, Aunt Peggy, what you talkin' 'bout, anyway? Doctor Fairfax ain't a-goin' to keep no sto', nor to sell no baskets. He's goin' to perfess an' to practise med'cine, like as his uncle do now. An' Miss Jocelyn, ma'am, I wants to persent you with my best wishes for both o' your happiness, ef you won't think its intrudin, Miss."

And Mahaly who prided herself upon knowing how to do things "in style," could not understand why her speech should be received with such a shout of irrepressible laughter.

"Them childern must always be havin' their nonsense," she remarked afterward to Aunt Peggy. "Miss Jocelyn, she up an' thanked me real sweet, like the puffick lady she is."

But it was her father's congratulations which had been the sweetest to Jocelyn's tender heart.

"My dear, brave, unselfish girl!" he had said, gathering her close to his breast, when she had come to him, first of all, with her gentle



confession. "You are your mother's own child; and if you make as good a wife as you have a daughter and sister, well, Master Dick may think himself a lucky fellow indeed!"

So he seemed to think, as he presently appeared, his handsome face all aglow, amid the expectant group.

"I couldn't wait any longer," he said earnestly. "It seemed as though you must be eating breakfast once for all! Mayn't I come in? Don't I belong to the Jay family 'fo' deed, an' fo' true' after this?"

And—"Oh! as if you hadn't, all along!" came the answer in merry chorus.

THE END.



























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